



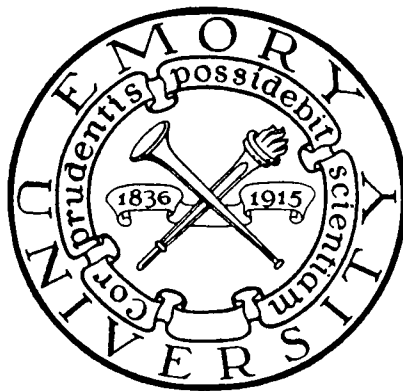
BY THE AUTHOR OF 'OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY'

# BID ME DISCOURSE



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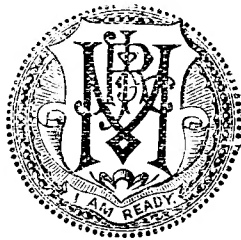
AND

## Other Tales

BY

MARY CECIL HAY

AUTHOR OF "OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," ETC., ETC.



LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, 14 & 15, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

AND

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## BID ME DISCOURSE.

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I FELT it to be a promise, though I made no answer in words: I only kissed the lips that bade me tell it all, and went silently from the room, half blinded by my tears.

But the promise shall be kept. I will take out the diary that, a year ago, I locked away, meaning never again to look upon it until as an old woman—patient and at rest—I could look back and see a glory shining on the darkest lay of all. The promise shall be kept, and I will re-live last summer-time, even though its great anxiety must weigh with the old heaviness upon my heart, and bring that one anguished cry re-echoing in my ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, July 19th, 1881.

I had sat on the pier for hours undisturbed. No men ever worry me to walk with them, as Selina says they worry her; no men entreat me to play lawn-tennis with them, as Clara says they entreat her; no men urge upon me the fact that life is unendurable without me, as Reby says they urge it upon her. I do not forget that I am thirty-one, a terrible age—as Selina often says: regretting that she is the sister next to me, and reminding everybody that the brothers who came between us died—but surely more terrible for me than for her, for she looks so very much younger that she need not mind, while the surest sign that I look my age is the fact that no one ever asks it. I hear my sisters and their girl acquaintances chatting over their ages and birthdays, but they always leave me outside the circle of such talk. I suppose there must be in the world a great number of women who through all their lives are *overlooked*, so why should not I be one among the many?

I was thinking thus, in a new mood of jealous discontent, this



very afternoon, though I was not jealous of my sisters, fashionably attired, strolling with friends and admirers up and down the pier. I was even sorry for them—as I have been often lately—when Archie Gavin, catching sight of me alone, left Reby's side and came over to me, with an eagerness which gave the lie to the affected indifference of his drawling question,

'Where is Miss Keveene all this time, Barbara?'

'Why ask me?' I said, a little pettishly, 'for you told me last night that you were uncomfortable with her.'

'So I am. She influences me, and no man likes to be influenced.'

'No,' said I, sedately, letting him pass on, without telling him that a certain speck upon the sea was the little boat in which Mary Keveene had been for hours alone. Then my heart began to beat, for my eyes had gone beyond Archie's slim retreating figure, and I saw Denis coming to join us after his six hours tramp. In his grey knickerbocker suit, coarse grey stockings, and big grey woollen Tam o'Shanter, he looked shabby rather, and not handsome, yet—as ever—his was a striking figure. A man who can never be among men, as I am among women, overlooked. Tall, wide-shouldered, with strong steadfast eyes, straight nose and straight moustache above a square and powerful chin.

'Where's Miss Keveene?' he asked, in his straightforward way, and then I knew—if not before—of whom I was so meanly jealous. I stood revealed to myself a despicable, jealous woman.

'Do you want her?' I asked; but am thankful to say the bad unworthy spirit died almost suddenly as I met his earnest, unsuspecting eyes.

'Yes, I want her. Do not you, Barbara?'

'Archie seems to think her a disturbing element,' I said, with an inexplicable little sigh. 'Some women are.'

'Fortunately for us some are not,' he added, with a kind glance into my plain face, while I knew how his eyes must be longing for the one he sought. Denis is always so kind to me; but then, of course, father used to be fond of him, and he will always remember that and be our friend, though I often have seen an irrepressible sarcasm parting his firm lips over some of mother's shams.

'Does she talk of going on soon to her relatives in Scotland?'

'No, she says there is no hurry,' I answered, smiling over his unthinking 'she' after the silent pause.

'Your mother does not care for her?'

I noticed that he did not say 'your sisters,' yet they cared even less for her than mother did, and indeed I sympathised with them, for, in spite of their striking complexions and toilettes, they sink into the background beside Mary Keveene, who yet has no more colour in her cheeks than in her chin and forehead.

'But mother will never be anything but friendly,' I said, 'for Uncle Steven came from Cork in the same vessel with Miss Keveene, and took a fancy to her; and when he found she was going to stay in Weymouth for a time—I believe it was a sudden decision of hers to delay her visit to Scotland—he asked mother to be kind and hospitable to her; and you know Uncle Steven doubles our income.'

'But,' said Denis, 'Miss Keveene is rich enough to dispense with any hospitality or friendliness from any of us, and certainly she makes no secret of the fact that she is indifferent to it.'

'No; my belief is that she cares for no one,' I declared, uttering at last a thought which had rankled within me for long.

'I think,' said Denis, in that good way of his to me which is never unkind, yet never untruthful, 'that she cares for you, Barry.'

He used the name that Mary herself had given me this very morning, and no wonder my heart beat and the red flamed in my thin cheeks; for through all my thirty-one years no one had called me anything but Barbara before.

'For me? It is impossible!'

'Well, say *almost*,' corrected Denis, honestly. 'She is growing to do so; I can see it in her face. I suppose she never speaks to you of her past?'

'No; but I am not one to whom she naturally would.'

'No!' smiling; then in an instant grave again and puzzled. 'Did you ever notice what terrible possibilities there are in her face?'

'There are in all beautiful faces,' I said, with one of my bad, spiteful feelings; and my gaze so firmly fixed upon the great white effigy of King George, cut upon the hill-side, that I did not see Denis walk on up the pier, though I understood it all when my eyes came back to rest upon the water-lilies on Selina's sunshade, as she bore down upon me just in time to be too late for my companion. It was quite half an hour before I could summon courage to follow Denis, thinking Miss Keveene would have landed; but when I reached the steps he stood looking down, and Mary sat in her boat below, calm, cool, debonair as ever. How can I describe this manner of hers, any more than I can describe her face? I remember how lamely Uncle Steven had said, 'Oh, she's young, and tall, and dark-eyed;' and as I stood looking down upon her, and she looking up, I excused Uncle Steven for not trying to go beyond this, though she seemed dark-eyed only because the grey eyes were shaded by such long, black lashes. A French assertion came into my head: '*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*,' and with it a sense of compensation. Yet what a pang of jealousy was in my heart that very hour, when Denis, after briefly welcoming me, turned his gaze so

hurriedly back. I—yes, I was jealous, though in the first hour I saw her I had felt inclined to cross the room and merely touch her, in a sort of gratitude to her for being so pretty!

It is not her beauty alone which puzzles me, and which I cannot understand; though there is a power in the calm grave sweep of brow and the beautiful eyes, which contrasts as strangely with the sweet tender lips, as the natural simple girlish manner contrasts with a certain indescribable bitterness most ungirl-like. That clear look in the grey Irish eyes gives the face a wonderful purity and innocence, yet there is a fire in them sometimes—indeed I cannot decide that it is ever quite absent—so scornful and derisive that it seems to betray years of contemptuous knowledge of the world. Yet though at times bitter words are uttered by the beautiful lips, and one sees a supercilious curve in the delicate white chin, the girl seems enfolded in such an unutterable sadness, that, though when I see how her presence charms the men surrounding her I am sorry for my sisters, I am always, strange to say, sorrier for her. Still I envy her often, as I envied her, this afternoon, the ease with which she could refuse all Mr. Vesey's persuasions to leave her boat. What would I not give to be able to speak to him so coolly, so indifferently? Not like the other girls, gushing and chatting and looking amused, for she often frowns and rarely smiles; not bridling or colouring, for I have not once seen the faintest rose-tint on the creamy whiteness of her face; and never taken by surprise to tremble and be a fool like myself. It must be new to him to be treated with such utter indifference, and such plain evidence that he is nothing to her, for to so many others he is—not nothing. He must see that he is one among many to her, that she is the same to all, indifferent, distant, sarcastic, yet easy, debonair, and never really ungracious. It amuses me greatly to listen to the various opinions of her, always given so freely to me, for I am one of those women who are made receptacles of other's opinions. All find fault, more or less, yet all seek her—I mean all find fault except Denis. He never does, however she treats him, and it is by this that I know he is growing to love her, and in the old-fashioned way, with single-hearted, entire devotion. Growing? Has grown; and, as I often say to myself, how could it be otherwise? Not only for the loveliness of her pale face and rich dusky hair; the eyes that darken so beautifully, yet sometimes seem to shine in rays, through the long lashes; or for that nameless grace that makes her *the* one on whom one's eyes must rest in any group; but even for that contradictory puzzling bewitchment which perplexes me, and makes me sometimes cry to myself, in pettish argument against my growing interest in her, 'No, I will not grow fond of a woman who is hard and bitter and untrustful, who believes good of no one, and certainly loves no one.' I had agreed with Uncle

Steven when he spoke of Miss Keveene as high-spirited and keen-witted, but I disagreed uncomfortably when he added true-hearted. Where did he read it, and why could not I? Yet why could I not read its opposite?

The girls came up to me—or rather, to Denis—and talked for some time in their chatty way, but through it all Mary sat in her little boat, in the corner formed by the pier steps, only looking up when specially addressed.

‘When one’s lower lashes curl so much down, and the higher ones up, what a pert look it gives a face,’ observed Clara to me in a whisper, and I tried to smile and assent, because I was sorry for them all, seeing that one of Miss Keveene’s glances was more to Denis than all their entertainment and badinage.

I think it was because he stood so persistently ready to assist her, that Mary did not show the slightest inclination to land, for not till all had gone but he, and she must have seen he was not to be evaded, did she leave the boat. And then she hurried after us, and walked among us, talking very little, but when she did almost cruelly, it seemed to me, in jesting cynicism of the people around us, and utterly indifferent to, or unconscious of, the very marked observation she elicited, even in her plain blue cloth dress, with only a band of the same colour round her black and white sailor hat, and leathern gauntlets half way up her arms. With the bearing of a princess, and that lovely face, was it strange that no one could compare with her among all we met?

‘How soon people get into the way of staring at any new face,’ Selina said, as we strolled to the esplanade; but of course she knew Mary Keveene had not been so long in Weymouth as we had.

Just then mother met us, and asked Mary to dine with us that evening, while I coloured with vexation because I knew she could not accept such a chilling invite; and took refuge in gazing up at the ugly statue a loyal town is raising to the king who once patronised it.

‘Thank you, Mrs. Oswald, not to-day,’ said Mary, quietly; and mother tried not to look relieved. Even here, as in our Queen Anne house in Chiswick, mother cannot resist getting up little dinners for two or three well selected young men, and how can she honestly welcome Mary when she cannot prevent Archie Gavin turning from Reby’s glowing face to gaze into the clear sweet depths of Mary’s wonderful eyes, and have no attention to bestow on others while he needs all his not too abundant wits to keep alert in conversation with her? Or, worse still, when she cannot prevent Denis Vesey’s straight, direct gaze passing over Selina’s rather unneat æsthetic presentment, and betraying, in a frank and manly way, his honest admiration for our guest?

‘Barbara,’ said Mary, rather suddenly, as Denis escorted mother over to our rooms, Selina on his other side, ‘will you come

in, after your dinner, and have coffee in my room? They will spare you then, and I'm sick of myself and of Silla.'

'Who is Silla?' I asked, feebly; while I cogitated over the possibility of joining her, surprised at myself for being so glad.

'My maid, she calls herself, but sometimes I get the fancy she is a dragon perpetually watching me, and I fly from her eyes—and her mouth.'

'Is she so——?'

'So harmless, so industrious, so everything that's meek,' said Mary, with a curt laugh. 'She is only a dragon to my disordered fancy when—wanting solitude, yet hating the self who needs must share my solitude—I join her, and let her watch me.'

'What a curious name Silla is!'

'Oh, her name is Drusilla, of course. I only chose those syllables to remind me that even that horror has a lower depth—a Charybdis beyond.'

'Why do you keep her?' I inquired, in my practical way.

'I am rich, you know, and, when my uncle's money came to me, of course I forgot how to do anything for myself, as I had done everything for three and twenty years before. It was an utter necessity for me to have a maid. She is Irish, with the hideous mouth of the normal Irishwoman, and sometimes, when I watch it, I positively tremble lest it should open.'

'Why did you choose this Drusilla?'

'Oh, I like her. You don't understand. Any other maid would be worse.'

Then I watched her into the great hotel which used to be King George's summer residence, and noticed her unconscious reception of the looks of interest and admiration given by a little group of gentlemen in the portico; and while she went on, enfolded, as it seemed to me, in a mystery that kept her solitary, I wondered how the same girl could be so nervously timid of a mere servant, and yet so indifferent to all the men who sought her favour.

It was comparatively early when, our dinner over, I went to Miss Keveene's sitting-room; for we all dine early enough to have a saunter in the gardens afterwards. Mary was sitting at the window when I entered, looking out, though she had an old book in her hand; and she went back to the same position when she had taken my hat and fur collar, and drawn me an easy-chair near her, putting her book away. She had on a soft, white dress, with a band of dead-gold satin round the waist, and soft falling laces at the neck and wrists, and, though it was a very simple dress, yet in the tender evening light she looked so beautiful that even I could scarcely turn my eyes away. I was as willing to sit in silence as she was; indeed, it is a treat to me, and not one I can often indulge in. It was an exquisite evening, and the shrill, glad voices of the children could not disturb the low, slow

music of the sea. But, though I sat looking out, my thoughts were on the beautiful girlish form near me. Rich, and young, and beautiful, yet looking unhappy, as she was looking then ! What use was wealth to her ? What could it give her save costly clothing, and could she look less lovely, whatever she wore ? I smiled as I thought of the difference from myself ; how I might spend a fortune on myself, and know it wasted !

‘It was kind of you to come,’ said Mary, at last, for a moment arching her white fingers above her eyes, as she looked far over the shining waters of the Channel, ‘from your cheerful party.’

‘I like this,’ said I, in my usual unvarnished manner, waking to the conviction that, though I was silent, I had not been, as is usual with me in any society, thinking what I could say. ‘I cannot listen from our windows. There is so much noise within, that I cannot hear those lapping little waves come in to their dreamy end upon the shore.’

‘From who knows how far and deep an impulse !’ put in Mary, almost hurriedly. ‘Can you ever feel quite gay by the sea, Barry ? Doesn’t it drink all gladness into itself ? Yet to-morrow it will weary me, labouring with the mighty secret it can never tell ; longing for the perfect rest it can never win. A weary monster, hungry, tireless, homeless, hopeless, endless.’

‘What different moods you have,’ I said, smiling. ‘But that is no new thought of mine. I sometimes feel you have a different mood for every person you speak to.’ And this could not have been a mere fancy of mine, for she might have been twenty girls for the varied verdicts I had heard pronounced upon her.

‘The sea is so much to me ! I want to die with the sound of it in my ears, and the love of it in my heart.’

‘You lived near it ?’

‘Once.’

‘Then went away ?’

‘No. Then ceased to live at all.’

I could not answer. I knew many people would show a sympathy which would woo her on to confidence, but I am so awkward. I stop to think, and that is fatal.

‘You mean when you grew rich ?’ I hazarded at last.

‘When I grew poor,’ she corrected, with a painful laugh ; ‘years before my Australian uncle’s fortune came to me as next of kin—to me, a village schoolmistress on the Irish coast ! That was only six months ago, but since those other awful days—how many years is it ? Three long years ; and I have seen no beauty since in anything or anyone.’

‘But then it was different ?’ I suggested, stupidly.

‘Then ! Oh, the freshness and gladness of spring, with its promised wealth of bud, and bloom, and verdure ! Oh, the scents and tints from those cottage windows of mine ! The sunlight on the trees or water ! Do the wild flowers clothe the valleys *now*



all summer time, from the hawthorn bloom till the acorns fall? Does the heath make the hill-side lovely? Do the birds in very gladness set to music all the poems of the flowers? Not now,' she said, pushing the dusky hair from her white forehead. 'They all teach one bitter lesson now—Love for love, hate for hate, life for life.'

I never had much money at a time; but at that moment I would have given all I had to know how to say what would soothe those low concentrated tones, and cool the feverish brightness of the beautiful eyes. I thought of everything—a hundred things—and the more I thought the less I knew. Just then there burst an old melody from a feeble cornet very much out of tune, and this put a common-place remark into my head.

'You were very much surprised, I suppose, to inherit such a fortune?'

'Surprised!' The straight, delicate brows came down into a frown, and I saw then that poverty had not taught her the bitterness she showed. 'It was years too late for surprise for me. Barbara, can you imagine such a dreadful thing as to wish to be what the apostle holds up to man's horror—"past feeling"?''

'I would not like to be so, Mary.'

'No,' she said, speaking uncertainly, almost as if in a dream: 'but you have not had heartache eating your very life, until—until— Can you fancy being conscious of such a terrible capacity for evil that you don't know whether you *will* do the evil, or have already *done* it? Until you don't know which is worse—the power to do the wrong without the will to prevent, or the consciousness of having done it without the will to repent.'

'Mary, you want change,' said I, anxiously.

'Change? No, I have change for ever. It is rest I want, and sleep. Who says of sleep, "A heritage it seems to me, worth being *poor* to hold in fee." Why, poverty is sometimes as sweet as sleep itself. Barbara,'—she suddenly rose and stretched out her hands before her—'why do you let me talk to you so? When you kindly come to cheer me, I have no right to even remember what Silla calls my *bad rest*. It will be all right some day,' pressing her white fingers on the fringed lids, 'and I shall sleep. "Her goggling eyes eternal slumbers shade;" is that it? Come, let us go out of this great aching place.'

'Yes,' said I, stupidly, wondering why her room should be a great aching place to her when she looked so easily and prettily at home in it, especially just then, for a waiter had brought in the coffee, and she began daintily presiding at the little table he had drawn to her side.

'We will go out and see the people,' she said, but looked the while into the calm, fair sky, as the music of the band in the gardens came to us in softened tones. 'Barry, I have a thought,' she went on presently. 'I will give a picnic on Portland Island.

A lunch in the prettiest part - if there are any pretty parts - at two o'clock, and entire independence of action before and after. Will that do, or is it too unconventional? I will ask those you think your mother and sisters will like, and arrange with the waiters here; but you and I will go over together early, and see the island first—catching a glimpse of the convicts, perhaps—we two only, if your mother will spare you. We can afterwards think how to end the day.'

I smiled at the notion of there being a doubt about mother sparing me, and also at the consciousness that they all would spare Mary as willingly, both before and after lunch.

'There,' she went on, as we sipped our coffee, 'is the imbecile old man and the Hebe-like girl who always walks beside him. Don't you pity her?'

'No,' I said, looking down upon the pretty face, 'I could pity her if she were plain and—growing old.'

Mary turned sharply, and looked into my thin plain face.

'Only then?' she queried. 'Do youth and prettiness save us from our greatest troubles? The horror of seeing, of watching—ah!' with a sudden change, 'that girl's heart is full; and she has to walk to and fro, to and fro, hours, and hours, and hours, every day; meeting girls with lovers, with mothers, with fathers, with sisters; laughing, happy, merry-hearted girls; and she will not know what she has missed till youth and prettiness are gone, and a cough and restless nights. Barry, are you ever wicked and mean enough to wonder why we were any of us born? No, I see you never were. Forgive me, dear. I suppose they will be looking for you in the gardens, especially Mr. Vesey,' with a tender smile, as she tried to cheer me. 'Poor boy!'

'Boy!' echoed I, astonished, but rather glad she had—so unlike herself—brought up Denis's name, because often I should like, for his sake, to speak to her of him, if there would not come that lump in my throat. 'One would think you forty. Do you know his age, Mary?'

'I know,' she answered, in her quietly careless way, 'that he is as much older than I am, as I feel older than he.'

'He looks, and is, ten years older than you,' I said, stoutly; 'and, if you knew him better, you would not utter—would not even listen to—a slighting word of him. He lives a very noble life, though in the past, through his father's extravagance, he has had even poverty to bear.'—'Even!' interpolated Miss Keveene, icily derisive—'And to bear it nobly requires the very highest kind of manliness. Don't you think so?'

'Ah! a plaintive little question to wind up your uncharacteristic outburst, and prove you Barbara still.'

'And then he paid all his father's debts, and now he is at the very top of his profession; and you would not believe what good he does, both in it and in his private life.'

‘No, I should not,’ she answered, chillingly. ‘I believe in the good no man does, only the harm. Why should we let them come into our lives at all?’

‘Yet,’ said I, rather surprised at my own sigh, ‘a woman’s life is never complete alone.’

‘It is never spoiled and darkened and destroyed alone,’ said Mary, rapidly. ‘But why do you speak so staunchly for Mr. Vesey, yet never for yourself?’

‘Because his whole heart is set on you,’ I answered, boldly, ‘and it is pathetic in me to see the change in him. I am sure he never loved before. He has been always courteous and kind and attentive to women, but never in love.’

‘Wise Sir Pelleas!’ laughed Mary, carelessly. ‘Loved all maidens, but no maid. Barry, you have your knowledge of men from books, not life.’

‘Of Denis I have knowledge from life,’ I said, resolutely. ‘And, as for my knowledge of books it is little enough, as Denis himself would tell you. Only yesterday I covered myself with confusion by mixing up Horne Tooke and Hookham Frere, when Denis was talking of one of them; I think I considered them one man, but, at any rate, I did not know the difference. I am still as stupid as I was twenty years ago, when Denis gave me Longfellow’s poems on my birthday, and I opened and read “The Village Blacksmith” first, and was so delighted that I wrote *My favourite* over it, without trying another. How Denis laughed!’ Mary, I added, earnestly, ‘do you dislike Mr. Vesey?’

‘Yes,’ she said, without a moment’s hesitation.

‘Do you hate all gentlemen?’

‘I hate all gentlemen, and I hate all barristers, and, as Mr. Vesey is a gentleman as well as a barrister, I hate him doubly.’

‘He is immensely respected and sought after in his profession,’ I put in, idiotically; for what woman ever loved a man for his professional success? ‘And he is very well off now, and a thorough English gentleman.’

‘I remember,’ said Mary, idly, ‘how a French traveller writes of the English young gentleman as “highly learned, and clever, but *not* a gentleman.” You cannot contradict a learned Frenchman, can you? Now shall we go? Silla,—to the maid whom she had summoned—‘get me a hat and my seal coat.’

‘Where is it, then, Miss Mary?’ asked the young Irishwoman, placidly. ‘Tisn’t in the bedroom, without it’s here.’

‘Why, Mary,’ I cried, when Silla had left the room, and we had both had a laugh, ‘you cannot mean that you ever feel afraid of her?’

‘Sometimes,’ said Mary, coolly. ‘But then I should be afraid of anybody—sometimes.’

As we walked along the parade, her silence was gone, and she

talked, as I had often heard her, with cold, light cynicism of the people whom we met, and did not seem even aware of the glances of admiration that followed her. Everybody seemed to be in the gardens, as usual, and Mary was won from me at once. It was but natural. I am accustomed to sit aside and look and listen, and I can interest myself in my own quiet, spectator-like way. This evening it amused me much to listen to the many criticisms of Mary Keveene, as she passed and re-passed, with that prettily indolent air that has no inertness, and is so different from Selina's languor. When she ceased to walk and came and sat by me, I thought it could only be for a little time, and that she would soon accede to one of the frequent requests to 'take another turn;' but she said 'No' persistently to the gentlemen who asked her, equally coldly and easily, yet, it seemed to me, differently to all, and still sat near me, silent, and with her head half turned away. She wore a lacey white hat, with a mass of soft feathers weighing down the broad brim, and this hid all from me save the curve of a round white cheek, the curl of the beautiful lashes, and the profile of a delicate little chin. I began to think nothing had ever suited her so well as this big hat, with its brim pinched into curious dents and curves: but then I had always thought every fresh thing she wore became her better than the last, because to each she lent her own exquisite grace and beauty.

Suddenly—so suddenly, I fear, as to show her that I started—she turned with a heavy sigh, and broke this silence, which, before to-day, had been unusual with her; broke it in that sweetly careless way of hers which, though cold, is never unfeeling. And as she did so, there came over me the curious sensation that she and I were drifting from the people around us—a ridiculously romantic notion for anyone so commonplace as I. Next moment I saw that Archie and Uncle Steven had sat down upon her other side.

'Have you offended Vesey, Miss Keveene?' Archie asked her. 'He does not look too amiable to-night.'

'It is the bottle-green coat,' said Mary, briefly.

'I like the coat, and he looks the handsomest man here,' I put in, with very tremulous warmth; and Mary laughed.

'A matter of opinion,' asserted Archie. 'I must own I have occasionally heard some curious, and not too complimentary remarks touching Vesey's appearance.'

'Trust you English!' said Uncle Steven, too shrewd not to see through Archie's jealousy. 'If we men have sense enough to vary our costumes between the Dog-days and December, we excite all kinds of remark. Why, I've seen the ex-Attorney-General of the United States walk the whole mile down Broadway with his coat over his arm, fanning himself with a huge palm leaf, and no one looking surprised or quizzical in the very slightest degree.'

'Oh, Vesey doesn't care how people look at him. He cares neither for the eye nor the voice of the public,' said Archie, in a tone I hated. Why, Miss Keveene, I actually saw him one winter morning sweeping the snow from before the door of his own house in Kensington.'

'He would look a gentleman doing that,' said Uncle Steven, bluntly; and a man is a noodle who lets his muscles rust.'

'But a man might find other ways of exercising his muscles,' suggested Miss Keveene.

'So he does, many ways; and I'll tell you that an hour after I heard of his sweeping the snow—and there was a reason for that—I heard him making his fine old grand talk, as Gavin would give the world to be able to do. That's the music I like, as I smoke there in the half light, without any jarring words. He may play what he chooses, it is all good, but perhaps I am fondest of Schubert's Sonatas.'

'Schubert's Sonatas according to Denis,' whispered Mary to me; but of course I could not smile, it sounded so unkind.

'I can fancy, Miss Keveene,' said Archie, attempting to speak low, 'how exquisitely you play.'

'I do not play at all,' she answered, coolly, just as Denis joined us and drew a chair near.

Now I do play—though very seldom asked—but I actually envied her her indifference over risking Denis Vesey's contempt for her deficiency in a talent—or rather an accomplishment—now so universal.

'Then of course you would make a good listener,' observed Archie, maliciously, when Uncle Steven left us.

'No, indeed. I think one of the saddest sights in this sad world is a room full of guests, who, all yearning the while to listen to themselves, sit gazing "intensely nowhere" while some one else performs, and then have to buzz approval whether felt or unfelt, while their thoughts—'

'Do often lie too deep for tears,' quoted Denis, in an odd way, as if he, gazing at her as he was, had read her speech differently from what we had, and did not hesitate to let her see this. But Mary might not even have heard, for the unconcerned manner in which she spoke to me.

'Barry, look at those gorgeous pink dresses. I see now that the use of sea-side promenades is to give us platforms on which to wear out our tarnished evening attire.'

'Those are devoted sisters,' said I, angry with her inconsiderate remark, and therefore looking quite cordially upon the two girls in the ridiculous pink silk elaborations.

'The lady with them is French,' resumed Mary, calmly critical, and unmoved by my fleeting wrath. 'Do you notice how seldom Frenchwomen have any bones or any starch? Their laces and silks are limp, their forms indescribably malleable.'

'Not to mention plain, in this instance, too,' supplemented Archie, while Denis looked straight out among the crowd, with perfectly grave, stern lips.

'You should be the last to say it, Mr. Gavin,' said Mary. 'According to Byron, no man under thirty ought to know there is a plain woman in the world. Though'—cynically—'he knew it of course—no one better.'

Then I spoke, but hurriedly and awkwardly, as is my wont, and seizing on the first thing I saw, because Denis's gaze troubled me.

'Aren't those two old gentlemen sociable, having their Bath chairs wheeled side by side?'

'Oh yes, I passed them just now,' said Mary; 'and—yes, they seemed very friendly and sociable, and interesting; exceedingly so. One asked, eagerly, "How much? How much?" and the other said, with intense and thoughtful mournfulness, "Only 7 per cent. No more, I fear, no more." Yes, they know how to thoroughly enjoy their holiday, you see.'

'You think very meanly of your fellow-creatures, Miss Keveene,' observed Archie, bending to her ridiculously, as if he were telling her a secret.

'Or rather, speak disparagingly of them,' amended Denis, quietly; and at that moment Archie answered a signal from Selina, and joined her gay group. 'When I saw you last night, Miss Keveene, gazing into that feebly-lighted room where there was a lonely child, you looked as if you longed to go and take her away—into happiness.'

'She was learning lessons,' explained Mary, without the faintest blush, though there was a tell-tale tenderness both in his voice and eyes. 'I was a schoolmistress for many years, and so I know that lessons are unpleasant.'

'And you *did* long to comfort her? I knew it. Yet you speak now as if——'

'Oh, I often look into the windows,' she interrupted, negligently, 'when a light allows me. It is one of my idle habits. In one window, not far from here, there is an old couple always together—always. It positively fills me with terror to see them so wrapped up in each other.'

'Why?' I inquired, in my usually prosaic way; though I was quite sure Mary had shivered as she spoke.

'Why!' she echoed, her eyes literally seeming ablaze behind the wonderful lashes, as she gazed into the band of calm gold light above the western horizon. 'When the wrench comes what will they do? People don't go hand in hand even to heaven. One *must* be left. What were we speaking of before? Oh,'—in a quite changed tone—'the windows I so meanly look into, as Mr. Vesey reminded me. Barry, there are two quite up in the town, in no fashionable part, and all day



long, and all night, I believe, at any rate, whenever I have passed, there's a woman sewing in one, and a man writing in the other; both pale and solitary; each working hard all day near the window, and at night burning one feeble candle. The problem constantly worrying me is—why don't they meet, and burn the two candles in one room? Think of that advantage, as well as the rent saved.'

'And the cheery relief of having one another to speak to,' added Denis, smiling. 'Does not that view commend itself to you with the saving gained?'

'No,' said Mary, recklessly. 'My life has been devoted to saving, and I appreciate that advantage best. Besides, after all, they would most probably not work half so well disturbed by each other. Each would mar the other's work.'

'I do not know why they should,' Denis said, gravely. 'I believe people are, as a rule, better than we think them; even better than they think themselves, and it does us no harm to idealise.'

A little silence; my brain following with a persistent, 'O willow, willow, wady,' to the accompaniment of the band, while I fretted over these sudden changes in the girl whom Denis loves, and her heedless revelation of captious, censorious thoughts. Then she went calmly on—

'Opposite to the hotel in Bristol, where I stayed after landing, there is the house of a young physician, and you can never believe what its windows cost me, Barbara. My firm belief is that he had not any patients at all, yet surely he did all that was possible towards getting them. He had flowers in the windows, bought freshly every morning, I am sure, regardless of expense; and pretty statuettes, always turned unselfishly to face the street. He had a model servant, kept on purpose to answer the bell the moment it rang, and far too superior to do anything else; and he awaited them all day, and burned a great red lamp all night to allure them. Beyond these weariful outlays, what could he do? He could scarcely go out and knock down a rich old lady that he might take her home and cure her; and if he had tried to propagate scarlet fever in the town it would of course only have seized the very poor, who could not pay—Barry, don't look at me as if I were a lunatic. It was a most tangled sensation really, for how could I wish patients for this poor fellow, who did his best to get them, without wishing suffering to somebody?'

'I think it was his solitude affected you,' said Denis, quietly, 'though you profess to love it yourself. When we drove to Lulworth yesterday, you isolated yourself all the time, even in the storm; yet I cannot help fancying you were alarmed.'

'You found me very soon,' she said, in her cold, gentle way; 'but I cannot fancy even a thunderstorm making me alarmed.' Then there fell over the beautiful face a strange momentary shadow which haunts me a little curiously, as if just for that second I had had a glimpse of Mary's past—or future.

'And you think solitude is better than the union between two?' Denis asked it very gently, gazing straight into her face, while I turned aside, looking in a vacant manner among the lights on the esplanade.

'Indeed I do,' she answered, with perfect ease. 'I have a most pious horror of what Queen Mary calls that sort of religion.'

'Love, you mean?' asked Denis, and just then the two red beacons seemed to me like eyes grown bloodshot from long looking out upon the cruel horrors of the sea.

'Marriage, she meant, did she not? As for love,' Mary went on, unconcernedly, though she must have seen, as I did, that strange perplexity which I had noticed more than once before in his steadfast regard of her, 'I was reading only this very evening some words I remember, and that are very true:—"Sir, quoth I, your age doth not yet bear that you should perfectly know what love meaneth. It is the foolishhest thing, the most impatient, most hasty, and most without respect that can be."'

'Who says that?' I asked, wishing I had taken cognisance of the old book I had found her reading.

'A very clever statesman; one who well knew the world.'

'I think,' said Denis, earnestly, 'that One, who knows the world as no statesman ever knew it yet, has given us love as the highest impulse of our lives—knowing exactly what those lives need.'

'It has not been given to me at all,' said Mary, coldly; and 'Twenty love-sick maidens we,' went the harassing words in my brain to the air from a dozen instruments, while we were all silent. Presently others joined us, and we went to walk until the day slowly and beautifully died; when Mary Keveene and I once more sat together. Then Denis came up to us, asking quietly, and I thought for him a little proudly, if it were not late enough to leave. I rose at once, though Mary took no notice.

'Do you know, Miss Keveene,' he said, with that puzzled glance at her that I have noticed many times, though I fancied he could only see, as I could, the delicate profile of chin and cheek, and a glimpse of the round white throat; 'your face gives me back a strange haunting memory which I cannot grasp. Can you help me?'

'No,' she said, and then was silent; while I, watching her, saw, to my astonishment, a slow blush, which saddened me as if it told of pain, yet was most beautiful, never touching her forehead, but seeming to brighten and deepen the red of her sweet, sensitive lips.

'Do you know Devon?' he went on, in his quiet, courteous way.

'No,' she said, answering readily, but without looking at him; and then she added, slowly and swiftly, 'Why do you ask?'

‘It is my own county. My father’s place was there,’ he explained, ‘and I was only going back in my thoughts for a clue. You do not know it?’

‘No.’

‘And you can give me no solution of this odd sensation?’

‘No,’ she repeated; and then I found that, white as her face had always been, save for that one momentary blush, it could grow whiter still; and I doubted whether I could indeed have really seen that soft pink colour where there was so sorrowful a pallor now.

‘You forgive me?’ he questioned, gently, as she rose; but she only bent her head and walked away in silence; I at her side—though of no use or comfort to her.

Friday, July 22nd, 1881.

This was the day of Mary Keveene’s picnic to Portland Island, and, according to her arrangement, I breakfasted with her, that we two might start early and independently. My sisters wondered over our choosing to waste so many hours alone, fatiguing ourselves and growing hot and dusty and dishevelled before the hour of assembling; but I am sure the wonder touched Mary only, as they knew too well that it made little difference to me whether my dress was fresh or my face cool; I was in any case so little likely to be noticed. We were to lunch at Bow and Arrow Castle at two o’clock, and when I joined Mary she had given all the necessary orders, and by nine we were ready to start. It is quite a habit now of ours to spend several hours of each day together, and though I am still puzzled often by her moods, and positively wounded sometimes by her mistrust and cynicism, I am each day drawn more and more, almost unwillingly, within her strong yet gentle influence. One day she really offended me, in a humour of passionate coldness, but her ready, wistful apology and fearless acknowledgment of wrong, her generous refutation of the slightest provocation on my part, and humble, loving entreaty for a kiss, were so different from our cool way at home of accosting each other after any disagreement, that afterwards I loved her better than before.

‘I am expecting great enjoyment to-day, Mary,’ I said. ‘Do you believe in anticipations?’

‘No—oh no,’ she answered, hurriedly. ‘And it is Friday, too! Why did I pick out Friday when I had six days of the week to choose from? Well, it will be a change, Barry, and that is always welcome; though I daresay, if anything happened to-day to make a break in this quiet life, I should long for even these days back again. Are you content to come with me alone, leaving to your sisters that pretty Mr. Gavin and the pensive curate, and—not to mention others?’

'It is a question for you, not for me,' I said, smiling at her pause. 'Denis Vesey is the only person difficult to be evaded, and it is not I whom he will go forth to intercept.'

'Nor anyone,' said Mary, calmly. 'I don't forget that you described him to me as a stern, inflexible ascetic. I am quite sure that—"For *him* by sad experience wise, at rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, *his* heart no longer flutters."

'No, not at rosy cheeks. But at last he woos in earnest, Mary, and in what I call a quite old-fashioned way.'

'Appropriate to buckled shoes, lace ruffles, and a powdered cue,' suggested Mary, drily. 'Now I am ready. What a sun we shall have all day upon our faces! O ruddier than the cherry—that I shall sing this evening to my nose. O browner than the berry—that I shall address to the rest of my classic countenance. Why didn't I borrow that ugly linen hat of Mr. Vesey's, in which he looks so like a wandering Bedouin, or perhaps a Nawab? Has he been in India?'

'Yes, three years ago; on some professional business—and literary too, I think.'

'Oh! he writes! Novels? No, I thought not, as you described him so inflexible. Do his writings also give one that subtle suggestion of the powdered cue and ruffles?'

'I told you that was the change in him since he has known you. Yet—don't you be deceived—he has the blood of his forbears in him, and one of them shot an Italian dead on the spot for paying a compliment to his wife.'

'Insanity? What a good thing he is the last of his race! Don't look so shocked, my Barbara. Woman is divided into two classes. First, woman whom everybody likes in a general way, and nobody especially loves; and second, woman who is not liked, yet will win one— Come.'

'Go on, Mary.'

'Go on with what?' she asked, coolly; yet her fingers were a little nervous over fastening her hat.

'Finish what you were going to say, for you meant that you belonged to that second class.'

'If so, I must have meant they were nonentities.'

'No, you did not; and I thought——'

'Don't think,' said Mary, with a laugh. 'Why, that was always a fatal habit, even back in the days of Naaman, wasn't it? Now I am ready;' and she stood before me, fair and cool, with a wreath of pink convolvulus round the small straw hat, whose brim was squeezed into a shadowy poke above her lustrous eyes.

'I positively don't think,' I declared, 'that you could look fast, even in a jockey cap, or—or unrefined even in a Tam o' Shanter. What are you going to wear to-night?' For mother had elected to give a little carpet dance as a conclusion to Mary's picnic, and I was accustomed to hear discussions on

these matters ; though, to my mind, among us the real art of dress was never studied. Selina always knew what was fashionable, and what was called artistic ; and the others followed in her lead, whether the garments suited them or not ; evidently that was not to be of any moment, for the wearer must adapt herself to the garment.

As we chatted, we walked quickly to the station, anxious to leave Weymouth unperceived. Once Mary gave a start when we met Denis's retriever walking sedately down from the station with the *Times* in his mouth, but I knew he fetched the paper every morning, so I had no fear of his master being near. When Mary rejoined me on the platform, after taking our tickets—for she declared I was her guest to-day, and must do nothing but enjoy myself—she looked at me a little quizzically, her eyes bright with excitement.

'I was on the point of taking third-class tickets, Barbara ; I only remembered just in time. Old habits cling to one, and I never used to travel otherwise. Are you very much ashamed of me ?'

I laughed, because there was so little abashment for herself in the eyes which, with all their radiance, had more of sadness in them than of mirth.

'You must be glad that you have no need to do so now,' I said, in my matter-of-fact way ; but once more that slow, pink flush rose in her cheeks, and I knew how wrong was my surmise.

'I would travel third-class all my life for one journey like those old ones !' she said ; and for the first time in my life I understood what it meant to hear tears in a voice. 'I have forgotten all their discomforts—if there were any ; and all their humiliation—if there were any. I only remember their joy. Oh ! Barbara, what an awful yearning that is for one of the old days ! For even a *dream* of the—dead !'

Of course I thought it would soothe her to change this subject ; but I soon found, as I so often do, how little I understood the strength, as well as pride, of her reticent nature.

'They were nearly always amusing journeys,' she added, quite suddenly calm. 'I remember once, in London, just as the train was leaving one of the underground stations, a porter at the door of our carriage—I mean the carriage I was in—hurried in two chimney sweeps, who were looking for seats. Barbara, if you had but seen the glance one gave the other when they were safely in, and his gravely uttered cogitation, "Now, 'ow did he know as we wuz third-class passengers ?" Do my old surroundings startle you ? I remember once hearing a smart girl, who sat next to me, whisper to her mother to hide the tickets, that their fellow-passengers should not see they were third-class. And as for civility, I've heard a guard ask a poor man for his ticket in a tone which said, quite plainly, "Never mind, if you haven't one ;

'I'll make it all right with the directors.' Not—with a droll little smile—'always, of course. But, indeed, Barbara, I am in earnest. Why, the very last journey we—I took, an old woman was ill, and I could not describe to you the sympathy and anxiety of all those poor people—poor by courtesy, as they were travelling cheaply. It was a suffocating day, yet all the windows were closed in an instant, lest a breath of air should be bad for her; and one girl went on to a station beyond her destination, because the old woman had fallen asleep against her arm. Oh, Barbara, what lessons do I learn in my travelling *now*? What good is the attention I win *now*? What does it avail me that the guards say, "Please," and "Ladies," now? I—I hate these different journeys.'

'I think each position has its good side, perhaps,' I said, with a frail idea of this being the sort of thing Denis might say.

'Perhaps so,' she answered, coldly. 'And I suppose this is our train.'

Mary seated herself beside an old gentleman, who began at once to talk to her, drifting into events which must have happened years before her birth, and introducing each with, 'If you recollect.' Mary answered in that easy, gentle way of hers, just as if she did remember, but I was afraid to meet her eyes, and so looked out as the train ran along beside that wonderful stretch of shingle beach which seems to separate the island from the coast. Opposite to me was an august lady of middle age, who left the train at Rodwell, and then turned and offered her hand in farewell to a friend who had entered the carriage with her at Weymouth, but to whom she had not spoken on the way. 'I presume we shall not meet again,' she observed, rigidly; but the other answered, with a sort of cheerful spasm, 'Oh! I don't see why not.' 'But I do,' was the stately retort. 'I shall neither visit you again, nor invite you to visit me.' And Mary's glance at me was irresistible.

There were no courtier clouds attendant on the sun this morning. He shone unveiled upon us when we came out from the Portland Station, to be assailed by numerous all too willing guides.

'Why should we not wander at will, and explore as we choose?' I asked Mary, in a semi-whisper, while she stood patiently detained by a dejected individual with boots cut skilfully open, possibly to give free play to his feet, but certainly to give us an unimpeded view of his stockings. He followed us, though other visitors came within his ken, and overtook and clung to us so unobtrusively and resignedly (when we tried to walk away from him) that we were obliged to accept the valuable services so modestly proffered. He could show us everything on the island as no other guide could, and bring us nearer to the convicts (so he assured Mary) than any other man ever born.



'I know he will cheat us,' she explained aside to me, 'and we shall have no independence; but I saw you could not resist the melancholy tones, Barry.'

'We can drop him presently,' said I, looking on him with a very different expression from Mary's half humorous, half sarcastic interest. 'He has a very disreputable appearance, and we shall soon know our own way about.'

'Cause and effect,' smiled Mary, as we went up the steep street at a snail's pace: not that there was anything noteworthy to detain us, but because it agreed best with our melancholy leader's financial projects and rheumatic ankles. He obliged us to pause continually, and always began to speak as if he had a great deal to say, but the words trailed off into sighs, and we never once ascertained that he had been going to tell us anything definite.

'Shall we never see the convicts?' I asked at last. Mary was looking away to the languid sea, now we had reached the height, but I was searching the hideously uncultivated stony scene around us.

'I have power to show you them quite close,' he answered, in his very unassuming way. 'I can take you where no one else on the island can. You will see all with *me*.'

'I have no doubt we could see them just as easily alone,' whispered Mary. 'But why do you wish it so, Barry? Isn't there wickedness enough in everyone we meet, without desiring such a conglomeration of it?'

I could see that hers was frank and honest contempt; but I could not deny that I wished to see the convicts, nor could I resist talking about them as we crept on.

'Surely sometimes a prisoner escapes?' I said; but our guide answered sadly that it had occurred only once, he thought. 'The men were making the reservoir, miss; I'll show it you presently'—'No haste,' interpolated Mary, drolly—'There came on a dense fog, and one man swam away. No one knows whether he was picked up or whether he landed, but afterwards the governor received his prison clothes back, with thanks for the loan. I'll show you the reservoir. With me you are sure to see everything worth seeing.'

'Now here we are,' this with a moan, when at last we were among the quarries, and Mary appeared to be still pondering his story. 'The quarries are closed while the prisoners are at work. They will be going to dinner at eleven o'clock, and I will show you them near.'

We paused just then at an iron turnstile on the roadside, and looked through. Above us an armed sentinel walked slowly to and fro on a raised path overlooking the quarry, and where he turned another sentinel took up the march. I gazed first into Mary's sweet, pale face as she looked through the iron bars, then into the distance. At first I could not distinguish any figures

save the darkly-clad ones of the warders, because the convict dress is just the colour of the stone they work on, but presently their movement revealed them to me, swarming, as it seemed, about those dark figures that were idle and watchful while they were busy; yet surely had harder work to do, and looked so few among them. I was gazing, in a dismal fascination, when the sentry told us respectfully we were not allowed to stand there, and we moved on at once; Mary's lips twitching a little with what I thought sympathy, but what I found to be genuine, honest indignation against these outlaws.

'When we have looked at the important objects I have to show you, ladies,' murmured our keeper, 'I will take you where you can distinctly see the gangs as they return to their work at one o'clock.'

'But that will be two hours hence,' intimated Mary, humbly.

'Yes, miss, it will,' with resolute meekness; 'but I've a great deal to show you.'

Of course, he had not a great deal, but what he had took a great deal of time, and so the two hours were over when we found ourselves in the same spot again, with no distinct remembrance of anything beyond having been lured by eagerly trading children into buying various lumps of what they called congealed water, found in the quarries, and of vainly trying several times to dismiss our guide.

'Now, ladies,' he gently sighed—stopping at the little inn called the 'Clifton Arms'—'they know *me* here, and will show you into a room upstairs where you'll see the convicts come from their dinner, nearer than anyone else on the island can. I'll wait below.'

Mary stopped to pay and discharge him, and, with melancholy consideration for us, he at last accepted payment for five hours' attendance. Then we followed a pleasant young woman upstairs into a prim room, jealously shut in with Venetian blinds, which she drew up, and muslin ones, which she took down.

'Of course,' said Mary, looking round when we were left alone, 'we could not have gained access to this public room in a way-side inn without the influential interest of our guide, philosopher, and friend. Oh, Barbara, what a world of shams this is!'—which made me smile, of course, for she had been his mildest dupe. Then I called her to the window, for the grey figures, carrying their implements, were tramping two and two along the quarry paths, the dark forms scattered here and there among them. I tried to count the number of men in each gang, and thought it must be five and twenty; but as I could not be sure, I turned presently to ask Mary. She had gone away from me, and was walking up and down the room slowly. 'It is as bad,' she said, 'as looking down upon the

Shambles on this calm, sunny morning, and knowing what deadly mischief they will work—another day. What, ready to go on, are you ?' Why, Barry, I should have thought this morning's experience would have totally unfitted you ever to hasten again. I suppose we must order something. We need not touch it, and can leave money on the tray.'

So Mary left a half-crown beside the untasted lemonade, and then we went downstairs to find our guide imbibing beer with pensive wariness. And, indeed, I was not surprised that Mary spoke so proudly to him, when he persistently maintained that his further society would be a necessity to us.

Free at last, we strolled across the fields behind the inn, when there happened what I had all the morning been prepared for. We were not conscious where we were going, only that, through the soft and dreamy air, we could hear the slow, lazy wash of the waves upon the Chesil beach, when Denis came up to us, in his boating flannels, his grave face brightening in the frankest manner when he met Mary's eyes.

'At last!' he said. 'I rowed to Fern Cave, fancying you would be there. I hoped to be in time to show you all you cared to see.'

'Oh, we have had a guide,' said Mary, carelessly ; 'a good man who grew so much attached to us that he would not part with us under half a sovereign, and then not without a struggle.'

'Miss Keveene, this is all the heath I can find yet in blossom here. Please take it ; you told me you loved it. Now, of course, your wish is to see the convicts.'

'Why should it be ?' inquired Mary, calmly fastening the heath at her neck—though we went the while with Denis out into the road, and back towards the prison. 'Why should we care so much to see an accumulation of crime ? Barbara, was not our guide enough for you ; for surely he was a convict once, or is to be, else why that cunning glance in his mournful eye ?'

'Miss Keveene, you should wear green glasses when you try to be hard on your fellow-creatures,' observed Denis, tranquilly.

'Surely you feel what a terrible life this imprisoned one is for men to lead,' I said, with a glance into her thoughtful eyes.

'Only what they deserve.'

'For some—yes,' acquiesced Denis, 'and the very justice of the punishment for some makes it for others, what Barbara says it is, a terrible life. Picture a man well brought up, refined, educated, who, in a moment of great temptation, or fear, or perhaps in a grievous emergency, has done one wrong act, for which, apart from all other punishment, he suffers, in every hour of the day and night, acute remorse and penitence. Think of his herding for years with ruffians and semi-idiots ; brutal villains—no, that is an insult to the brutes—hardened villains, not only guilty of hideous and barbarous crimes, but actually revel-

ling in the anticipation of committing others ; professional, life-long thieves, born in the prison or workhouse, growing up in an atmosphere of vice until no other is endurable to them—very devils, who don't know what conscience means ! Surely, even a day's incarceration with such vile associates, would be punishment enough for one unrepeatd crime such as I spoke of.'

'Evidently you have a sympathy with these convicts and criminals, Mr. Vesey,' said Mary, with chill disdain.

'In a certain sense, I have,' returned Denis, gravely. 'It is my hope to do something towards changing the punishment for such as those. But,' throwing off his seriousness, 'we need not think of that to-day. See, there is a little gang of convicts at work just where we shall pass, and only one warder needed to them all. I notice Barbara is far more ready to study them than you are, Miss Keveene.'

'It is a dreary and disappointing study,' Mary said.

'Oh, they are just like ordinary workmen,' I put in, as one young man, his white unsheltering cap pushed back upon his sunburnt face, looked down unabashed upon us from his ladder.

'Some of even those were horrible faces,' said Mary, hurrying, and actually shuddering when we had passed ; and how fearful for them to have to raise by their own hands these great prison walls that shut them in !'

'Look over here, Miss Keveene,' said Denis, showing us, in the pretty garden of the governor's house, a man in blue, and with hair of ordinary length, indeed—longer than Denis's—working on his knees among the flower-beds, while a dainty little maiden of five or six stood talking to him.

'The men in blue are serving their last three months,' Denis explained, 'and their hair is allowed to grow. Any friend of that fellow's could recognise him now, don't you think, while among the others one could scarcely detect even an old friend ; could one, Miss Keveene ?'

'I could,' said Mary, readily. 'What disguise is there ? should I not know his step, his bearing—what ? It would change, you think ? Oh, what nonsense we are talking !' she added, with a smile, as Denis returned a salute from some one in the prison gateway, and we walked on past the warders' houses, with their fresh white curtains, and windows filled with brilliant flowers, showing care and love for pretty things. 'I cannot think,' she said, glancing from the groups of children in the road to the women sewing in the doorways, 'how mothers can bear their children to grow up here.'

I intended in my practical way, to ask her why, but just then I saw that the churchyard gate was open, and that distracted my thoughts. There was to be a funeral presently, the loiterers told us, so we passed in unhindered, and strolled round into the quietness behind the church ; while Denis told us how it was

built by twenty-eight convicts who had been brought up to no trade, and how the one who did most, if not all, of the really beautiful carving, stayed voluntarily three months behind his time to finish, and now was earning a handsome income by this power he had discovered in himself. We stood beside a gate in the further wall, and looked into a large quarry, smiling to think that chance had given us here the very opportunity which had been out of reach even of our boastful guide. Presently, while my eyes were fixed upon the distant grey figures, so little noticeable among the masses of grey stone, Mary called my attention to one man wheeling a barrow heavily along on the other side of our wall, a warder following close behind him.

‘What an evil face!’ she said, when he had passed. ‘He must have a pigtail hidden in that cap, Mr. Vesey; for surely he may well answer to the name of “Ah Sin.”’

‘Denis, what does that L mean on the blue badge on his sleeve?’ I asked.

‘That his sentence was for life, and below are his number and initials. The ticket being blue shows that he has served three years already.’

‘Three years—already!’ echoed Mary, with a quick catching of her breath. ‘You speak of three years as if it were a day, instead of a lifetime! But’—with one of her sudden changes of tone, as she looked after the two men—‘I would rather be a convict than a warder.’

‘Oh! hush, Mary, I know you don’t mean it, but why do you speak so recklessly?’

‘I suppose it is reckless, Barry,’ she said, her lovely eyes strangely puzzled, ‘for it is Satan, isn’t it, who says, “Make Thy souls better, Lord—or worse.”’

‘Denis,’ I said, hurrying in my speech for fear of these words of Mary’s hurting him as they hurt me ‘what is that whistle and command for?’

‘For the men to fall in and be counted,’ he told me, his grave, stern eyes turning neither to Mary nor me. ‘Each warder counts the men under him once in fifteen minutes.’

I remember that after that we chatted together merrily, leaning on the wooden gate; indeed we grew even frivolous when, Denis having asked Mary to tell him what flowers she would wear that night, for him to send them to her, she plunged into a gravely ridiculous discussion as to what he would wear himself. I should at any time have been shy of beginning such a silly feminine topic before Denis, but to my astonishment he seemed quite interested. How strange it is that the same subject should be so different when uttered by two different people!

‘You have your sisters to consult, Barry,’ explained Mary, with droll solemnity. ‘Poor Mr. Vesey and I have to study the art of dress alone.’

‘You have no occasion to study it,’ said I, warmly, ‘and, luckily for them, men do not need. It makes so little difference in them.’

‘So little!’ she cried. ‘Why, Barry, even

“Hokee Pokee Crack-my crown,  
King of the Island of Gulp-em-down,  
Was thought the finest young man about town  
(*Only*) When drest in his best for a party!”’

‘I see that I must be dressed in my best for the party,’ announced Denis, laughing over her emphatic accent of the added word.

‘Yes; but can you do it unaided? He could not, for

“Hokee Pokee Ching-em-e-ring,  
Nineteenth wife of this mighty King,  
Loved her lord above everything,  
And decked him out for the party!”’

‘Ah! then,’ said Denis, ‘I must wait until I have a wife who loves her lord above everything. Well, my comfort is that I’m a fellow whom nobody notices at any party, and might go decked with the broad arrow like the poor fellows there; while you——’

‘No, you are not unnoticed, Denis,’ I put in, awkwardly, ‘for Uncle Steven says it is in the papers that you are here—the popular writer they call him, Mary.’

‘The writer writ; I see. Do you write—cleverly?’ asked Mary, glancing at him with ludicrous inquiry.

‘No, indeed,’ he answered, his eyes warm and tender in their merriment; while I worried myself whether it could be contact with the world which had taught Mary Keveene the trick of taking all things coldly, or whether it could really be, as I feared, that nothing ever could stir her save some hidden past.

‘I think,’ she said, carelessly, ‘there is no need for any of us to know more than just enough to talk about.’

‘Or is it better,’ he asked, ‘to know enough to think about?’

‘And best, you mean,’ she added, with a little laugh, ‘to know enough to write about? Perhaps so. It certainly makes a wonderful difference how things are written for us. For instance, if Barbara and I read of a fight among those men we should shudder with horror; but when we read of the knights whose good swords carved the casques of men, it is a little different, isn’t it, Barry? What? They fought in a good cause, you say? Who is to decide that? Not Mr. Vesey,’ she added, audaciously, ‘for I’m sure he knows more about these felons than about Tennyson’s knights.’

‘I know of one—and I understand him best——“who loved one only, and who clave to her.”’

I felt very silent, looking away among the busy, distant figures, but Mary answered him placidly.

‘It must be very dull to love one only—always.’

‘You cannot understand,’ he said, in his earnest way. ‘I cannot expect that you should. But even you may be some day glad to feel that you were one man’s only love.’

‘But why could not the model knight love one only, and *not* cleave to her?’ inquired Mary, absurdly. ‘That would have been more unselfish, and more comfortable for her.’

‘Mary,’ said Denis, uttering her name a little brokenly, ‘will you remember some day how impossible it would be for me to love again—however hopeless my love is? And how through all my life now I must love one only, even if she——’

‘Ah,’ cried Mary, lightly interrupting, ‘there comes another convict across the quarry, directly towards us. Is it another Ah Sin?’

I saw that Denis did not turn his eyes away from her face, taking this merely for an ingenious diversion of the subject; but I followed her gaze. The light swinging step of the man who came towards us in his white knickerbockers and dark blue stockings, carrying a pick upon his shoulders, and with the dark, watchful jailer following closely upon him, struck me instantly; and there came into my mind a sudden perception that there was something different from the other men in the way that this man even wore his cap. Then I remember mechanically trying to read the number on the blue ticket on his sleeve. But I got no further than the L. He had a lifetime of punishment to come, and so what matter that three years of it were over? How they had told upon him; for the face, though young, was terrible to look upon in its hopeless, haggard despair—I could gaze unembarrassed, for his eyes were fixed strangely and vaguely far away from us.

Involuntarily I turned with a questioning glance at Mary though I cannot understand why, unless I hoped that she might acknowledge *this* face was not wholly evil. She stood as she had done before, but now with her elbows resting on the gate, and one clenched hand on either temple. In the first second I thought she had fainted against the bar; in the next I knew this change in her was worse than any swoon. Her dark, dilated eyes were filled with terror; her breath came in hurried and irregular gasps; and her parted lips were colourless as the white forehead from which she had feverishly pushed the soft dark hair. I do not know that I can tell what happened after that. I scarcely seemable to write how even the afternoon passed. My heart bled for Mary when I saw how bravely she kept the fact before her that we were her guests, and that to be bright, and watchful, and alert for us was simply her duty as hostess. Now and then I could not help fancying she looked at me wearily, as

if she longed for a word of sympathy even from me, because I must have seen that sudden shock of hers ; but the thought had vanished almost before I could understand it, and then again I felt certain she must be unaware of my having noticed her. I am ashamed to say I was glad to think this, and that Denis had felt so sure his words of love alone had wrought the sudden change in her. Still I knew that the fancy must puzzle him strangely, though what else could he think, when he had not looked up to see where her gaze was fixed ? And now he saw her so merry, but I thought it a wild, uncertain, reckless merriment.

I once, far on in the afternoon—for we had been long over the abundant, luxurious meal Mary Keveene had provided—found her standing alone, back in the shadow of the old castle built by our second Norman king, and seeming to have forgotten us all, as she stood gazing wistfully over the sea ; her eyes, after their brilliant excitement, looking unutterably dark and sad in the white, uplifted face. I could not even myself understand the yearning there was in my heart to be near her then ; I do not mean to be standing at her side, silent as she was in the soft, dreamy air ; but to feel that her thoughts would touch me ; that her heart would hold me ; that my love was something to her. In my unskilful way, I did at last join her, but did not speak, because again she seemed to be so far apart from us. But she turned tranquilly to me as if I had summoned her by message, and asked me, in her gentle, careless way, if I had noticed the movement of that seaweed on the waves, was it not beautiful ? What could I say then ? Nothing of this strange new yearning there was in my heart, and therefore I made no effort to say anything else, and presently we joined the others, just as if we had only turned aside for a moment to really look at the seaweed on the waves. I remember that when Uncle Steven and Denis joined us they were speaking of the convicts (in that spot it seemed such a natural topic to fall into !) and I looked at Mary, for she had rapidly silenced or changed any conversation that touched upon them. Uncle Steven was excusing the prisoners for bribing their warders when they could, and Denis, upholding his opposite idea, said it would help the great and needed reform if they would feel themselves above it in a moral sense.

‘Pooh ! pooh !’ said Uncle Steven. ‘After years of *this* life I would not give twopence for any man’s morality.’

I saw Mary’s very lips blanch, yet a minute afterwards she was answering a jest of Archie’s with another. When we were separating to walk or explore, she and I were supposed to have had sufficient exercise all the morning, and would have been left behind ; but Mary seemed to have no idea of that, and attached herself to Reby and Archie, as if inaction would be positive pain to her. I do not know whether Denis joined them, but he re-



turned with Selina only ; and it was quite half an hour after the scattered parties had re-assembled, when she quietly joined me, as I rested against the broken arch of the old church which was once the centre of the island, but is now upon the edge of the cliff. There was no longer burning, brilliant sunshine, for the sky, so clear an hour ago, was overspread with gauzy clouds, and the water was more grey than blue.

‘You should have come with us, if only to see the hart’s tongue at Fern Cave.’

‘This is very pretty,’ I said, looking vaguely among the old tombstones.

‘Yes, but the prettiest bit of your view is spoiled by that railway they have made—I suppose in erecting the breakwater.’

I did so long to set my mind at ease, fearing she had been alone and unhappy, that at last I had the courage to question her.

‘Alone !’ she repeated. ‘How could I have been alone ? You forget, my dear, that this is my picnic. I am only too proud to be among my guests.’

‘You could surely take a little solitude if you choose,’ I said, though made uncomfortable by her words.

‘Why should I ? Listen, Barry, with what great, heavy sighs the sea breaks upon the beach below ? Do you ever notice how little mirth there is in any voice of Nature’s ?’

There came into my mind how I have read that the valleys laugh and sing, but somehow I could not say it. I would rather she should think Nature sad while she was sad herself, and so again I was silent ; till she suddenly and gently took my hand and smiled—though a smile sadder to me than many tears. ‘Come, Barbara, my model waiter has tea prepared for us. We must not be absent.’

‘Yet,’ I said, with a spasm of desire to break the ice between us, ‘I—I wanted to speak to you, Mary—if I might.’

‘Of course you do,’ said Mary, with a most unnatural composure, ‘and I too, my Barbara, want to speak to you—“Of many things ; of shoes, of ships, of sealing-wax, of cabbages, and kings. Of why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings.” Varied subjects, of course, but suitable for a picnic, don’t you think ? Come ; your uncle teased me and said, if he had organized the picnic, he should have ordered tea, and so I want to see his surprise when he finds it awaiting him.’

As we drove back to Weymouth, when Mary’s picnic was over, I had several times to pull myself up with energy, because I fell so easily into watching her ; yet I think not once through the drive did she glance at me. She never looked save straight into the face of the person she addressed, or down upon the flowers in her lap, while her eyes shone so feverishly that even the long lashes could not veil their fire.

Well as I knew that I could never be of use or comfort to her, I hated the thought of leaving her, and perhaps she saw this in my face, when we stood separating after the drive—reminding each other we were to meet in our rooms presently for a dance and supper—for she asked me to go with her and stay while she dressed, promising that then she would come and help me to make up for lost time. I knew there was plenty of time, and was only too glad to be with her still—a strange feeling, considering that her reckless depreciation of her own suffering gave me positive pain. I think I had the fancy that alone with her, in her own room, it would be comparatively easy for me to show a little of the sympathy I felt so keenly, yet could not express; but I soon found that was a great mistake of mine. It not only was not easy, but it was not even possible.

While her maid changed her dress, she talked to me exactly as if I had gone in with her for the one sole purpose of being amused, and even the young Irishwoman's gravity must have been sorely taxed.

'Silla does not approve of this dress, Barbara,' Silla's mistress said, lightly, as she looked meditatively on the whiteness of her arms against the pale salmon pink skirt; 'though I'm sure she does not know what colour it really is.'

'Not I, Miss Mary. P'raps 'tis drab, and p'raps 'tis red, but anyway 'tis brown.'

'Selina had a long search for that shade,' said I, laughing, 'but failed in getting it.'

'I bought it in Dublin months ago,' said Mary, listlessly. 'Your sister would look better in it than I: there's more of her than there is of me.'

'Not a bit more,' asserted Silla, with a sort of prompt unreasoning loyalty. 'She may be taller and stouter, but there's not wan bit more of her, Miss Mary, me dear.'

Just then there was brought to Mary as beautiful a bouquet surely as Weymouth could produce. Mary held it, looking down upon it, then she took up the spray of heath I had seen Denis give her, and which she had worn all day, and looked from one to the other, half wistfully, half quizzically.

'Which shall I wear?' she asked me; but I shook my head. This was a question I would not answer, though I was growing so much more sensible now about Denis.

So Mary turned, half laughingly, to Silla.

'Which do you like best?'

'I don't like eether best, miss,' said the maid, with honest impartiality. 'I jest prefer them both equally the same.'

'Then,' said Mary, gravely, 'I will wear the heath—only.' And she did, but it was so hidden among the laces of her square cut bodice, that I felt sure Denis would not see it.

'Are you cold, Mary?' I asked, seeing that her face was as

white as the soft white cloak that Silla wrapped about her ; but she shook her head, took her long mittens in her hand, and we started off together, while everything was clear and beautiful in the still evening air, and even the grim island, where this morning Mary had met such a strange and tragic shock, looked picturesque in the twilight hush and calm.

‘Barbara—we had walked silently, Mary’s eyes still on the island—‘I remember we did not think the same to-day. Do you recollect what Mr. Vesey said about men of refinement, and of good birth and education, herding with those hopeless, hardened fiends? I said they all deserved it ; I suppose they do, but I—wish I had not said it. I wonder how long hearts take to break.’

Yes, I knew how differently she had treated this before, and how I had wondered a little over it, but I only looked round silently into her face.

‘What is the matter?’ she asked, abruptly. You would say you were not surprised, because I am hard on everyone. Yes, so I am. How cold it is!’

I knew it was not the fresh evening air which had made her shiver, or brought that little catch into her voice ; but, acting on instinct, I pretended that I, too, thought it cold, and begged her to go back and put on the fur cloak carried by her maid, who followed us far behind ; saying that I would saunter on very slowly. The trifling ruse succeeded, for when I let her overtake me she was just as she had been in her own rooms.

The evening was one of those to which we are so accustomed at home, except that I danced two or three times, whereas I seldom dance at all at home, there being, as a rule, a scarcity of gentlemen. I only care to remember my one dance with Denis, and yet the pleasure of that was a little marred ; for when, by what he said to me, I was assured beyond all doubt that he had laid the sudden change in Mary to anger against him for so unmistakably telling her there, and in my presence, that he loved her, I—though I thought I should be relieved by this assurance—suddenly awoke to the conviction that I wished he had discovered the truth. I felt then that it would relieve me of a ridiculous weight of anxiety if Denis knew, for he—so wise and thoughtful—might advise her, if not help her.

Wednesday, July 27th, 1881.

Since Friday—the day of Mary’s picnic to Portland Island—she has, I think, avoided us as much as she possibly could without making the fact too patent. Once at our dance, when she was sitting at mother’s side, mother did question her inquisitively on her past, as if to seek some solution there for her odd,

unconventional behaviour, and, though there was nothing marked in her reception of this scrutiny, I thought that in her manner afterwards there was an added solitariness and coldness. To-day I felt I could bear this isolation of hers no longer, and so I went to seek her, feeling quite sure she would be within doors on such a showery morning. Between the showers, I ran into the hotel and up to her room, but she was not there. The Irish maid came in at my summons, and stood looking out upon the wet scene with a sort of glum disapproval.

'No, Miss Oswell, Miss Mary's nawt in,' she said, in answer to my query. 'Even these downpowers don't bring her in loike they bring everybody e'se. Jest you see!' A sudden scud of rain had sent all who had ventured out flying into the houses, and the esplanade was deserted, save by a man who stood patiently covering his tray of sweets with yellow tarpaulin. In a few minutes the rain ceased, and the man displayed his merchandise as patiently as he had covered it, while the people gathered again, though not in the hurried manner in which they had dispersed.

'Oh, it will not hurt Miss Keveene,' I said, as the sky grew silvery bright along the horizon. 'I daresay she has been safely indoors somewhere all the while.'

'Nawt she, miss, beggin' yer parrd'n,' said Silla, with a sense of injury upon her; 'Miss Mary's over on the oisland. She's bin there hours already. She's alwis there. She took me yesterday'—rather vengefully—'an' a noice day we had; walkin', walkin', walkin', till I was killed alive. Then talkin' to the wickedest-lookin' people, an' to women we'd niver so much as seen before; an' wance Miss Mary givin' money slyly to a man that looked loike a p'liceman—in Oirland, not a p'liceman here, miss—an' givin' cakes to children; an' us havin' meals up in a sheer little room without ever a carpet; an' gettin' mean little scimpy flowers, an' pretendin' she goes for *them*; an' makin' me carry ferny things, as if we thought nothin' of anythin' but goin' to that stony place to see ferns an' sich. An' you believe me, Miss Oswell, she went to one cabin an' asked if they'd lodgin's to let; an' so p'raps to-morrow she'll jest say, "Put up some clo's, Silla, we're going to live in Portland." Glory me! I'd be 'shamed to own I'd trod such a ne'er-do-well place. Oh, she's fit for even that, is Miss Mary, if the mood's upon her—'

'Is not it growing fine, Silla?' I put in, not because the sun was shining, but because I could not listen to more.

'Sure it isn't rainin', allowed Silla, grudgingly; 'but the wither keeps on jest the same.'

To hide my smile I leaned from the open window, and, doing so, I saw Mary and Denis Vesey walking slowly, side by side, towards the hotel, but in evident silence. I intended to wait there till I caught Mary's eye; but, when I saw her gazing

coldly and absently straight before her, I looked at Denis, and in a moment I read in his face enough to tell me he had had a cruel blow. I drew in hurriedly, wishing myself anywhere but where I was ; for, though I felt so much for Denis, I knew there was greater suffering on Mary's pale, still face, and that, as soon as she came to me, I should forget all sorrow but hers—so weak-minded am I !

'The clouds are breaking over the head, Barbara,' she said, as she came in, just as if she had been away from me for a few moments merely to study the weather. 'How strange that glare of sunshine looks on such a heavy, swelling sea, while all between us and that beautiful splash of silver is unbroken cloud ! It is a scene of—memory.'

'And of hope too,' I said, involuntarily.

'Are ye goin' to change yer wet dress, Miss Mary, me dear ?' interposed Silla. 'I ordered a fire to dry these things by, but I daresay 'tis not lighted. I'll go ; for if I do it meself, maybe 'twill be done.'

'Barbara,' said Mary, turning to me with an odd little catch in her breath, when the maid had left us, 'have you wondered where I have been to-day—and lately ? I have been over the old ground you and I trod together so—ignorantly last Friday morning ; over it again, and again, and again. I wondered that day, Barry, why you wished to know so much. Do you remember ? Afterwards I wished to know it too, and—more. But I—cannot learn.'

'You should not have gone alone, Mary,' I put in, weakly, wondering how much or how little she wished me to comprehend.

'What is it to me to be alone ?' she asked, with a laugh that was utterly sorrowful. 'Who cares that I am alone ?'

'I do.'

'You ?' she said, and bent suddenly to me with a swift, sweet kiss. 'You are nearly always alone yourself ; you are a good preacher, therefore, my Barbara.'

'Then Denis was not with you all the time ?' I asked, impelled by a sudden impulse to woo her confidence.

'No,' she said, speaking slowly ; yet even I could detect that it was an effort to her to keep her voice quite calm. 'He joined me only a little time ago. It is the last time he will ever do so.'

I understood, of course, what she meant to tell me ; yet, though Denis was a friend of long, long years—the very truest, dearest friend whom I had ever had—and though I knew she had given him the greatest sorrow of his life, I was more sorry for her, as she stood there before me so still and grave, and incomprehensible to me. I thought I could understand Denis Vesey's sorrow, but hers I could not.

‘What was I telling you?’ she went on, presently, as if stifling a sigh that would have passed her tremulous lips. ‘I have learnt all I can there, it is but a little to help me, and now I am going to London, Barbara.’

‘To London?’ I echoed, in simple astonishment. ‘Alone?’

‘Yes; why not? You forget—’ gently—‘that I am not used to being with a mother, as you are.’

‘Mary,’ I whispered, before the thought had had time to shape itself properly to me, ‘take *me*.’

She looked into my eyes searchingly, wistfully; then laid her two hands on my shoulders, and just said, very softly, ‘Yes,’ with no surprise, or thanks, or comment; and yet the word said so much! More than a kiss. Then the one drawback to this plan came into my mind. ‘But, Mary,’ I said, unwillingly, ‘I fear I must be an expense to you.’

‘An expense!’ she echoed, with a real smile in her eyes; though, before it had stirred her lips, it had vanished. ‘No, not an expense, but a comfort, Barbara;’ and then, like the simpleton I am, I went away to hide my tears; for I have so longed to be a comfort to her!

To-night, before we separated in the gardens, Mary held my hand for a few moments (she looks so different dressed in brown, as she has been ever since Friday, with a little demure brown bonnet tied under her chin, though quite as beautiful to me) and asked me whether it had been difficult for me to win permission to go with her.

‘Not at all,’ I told her, and did not add that my sisters seemed not sorry she was going, and of course could spare me to her very well.

‘Then we will leave to-morrow morning.’

‘To-morrow?’

‘Yes, to-morrow, please.’

As I went in alone, a few stars looking tenderly out of the blue above, I pondered this, and whether Denis would seek Mary there; for I had not seen him since I had caught that glimpse of his troubled face in the morning, and I guessed he had left Weymouth, and was perhaps in London now.

Friday, July 29th, 1881. Morley’s Hotel.

We arrived here yesterday, and to-day Mary has been prosecuting the quest which brought her to town. She had told me that in a coffee-house in the Strand copies of the *Times* were kept filed, and that she wished to read them, so we went there at once this morning; her step shrinking as she turned into the building, which was strange to her, though her great dark eyes were fearless in their excitement. I especially wish not to be intrusive,

and so did not go in with her, but beyond that I have a nameless fear of seeing her make the discovery which still I know she wishes to make. So, though uncomfortable at leaving her, I walked on, backwards and forwards, at first taking quite long walks; but letting them get shorter and shorter as time crawled on, until I fell into passing slowly to and fro before this corner house in which Mary stayed so long. I was quite unaware that it was an establishment which on any ordinary occasion it would have been my chief aim to shun as a haunt, until a young man, with his face wreathed in smiles, asked me significantly whether he should 'go in and fetch 'im out.' This caused me an acceleration of heat by no means needed on this July day, and at once I turned into the house, glad of even such a privacy. A man who met me at the top of the stairs demanded a penny; then I entered a room he pointed to, where Mary was bending over a table on which a great folio of newspapers lay open. For some time she did not seem to see me, but I found a chair, and so I did not mind. At last she raised a pair of feverish eyes from the open pages, and looked dazedly at me, as if—yet not as if—she had expected me to be there.

'Barbara,' she said, 'I have learned—some of it, and can remember; but—come here and write this for me, will you? *Mr. Poland and Mr. Montagu Williams prosecuted.*—Mr. Poland and Mr. Montagu Williams—do you understand? Now, look. You see the name of the barrister who defended? Copy that, please. He is very clever, very well known. We have both heard of him. But you see there was another, too. You see? Mr. Henry. He is supposed to be a very promising young barrister, for I met him lately in Dublin. I know where he is to be found, for he told me a curious tale of his—rooms.'

'Yes,' I said, stupidly, in her eager pause.

'So—through those two—they called it manslaughter, and I must learn from one of—Now, Barbara,'—her feverish gaze once more upon the paper—'write this: *The prisoner was charged with the murder, on June 27th, 1878, of George Haslam, of Rocklands, Devonshire, to which he pleaded not guilty. Not guilty.* Barbara, have you written it?'

'Yes,' said I, my hand shaking over the task, as she spoke in such a low, impetuous way.

'Write again—here it is. *On being called upon for his defence, he only said, addressing the jury, that he should be glad to have his suspense terminated, and know the worst.* Write that, for I cannot remember—some words. They—go from me. Here—here. Her white fingers turning the leaves, and going steadily down another column, though her eyes looked too wildly bright to fix themselves upon the print. 'This is another day. *The prisoner heard his sentence with firmness, just slightly bowed acquiescence, and was taken away from the dock, and thence to gaol.* Write it,

Barbara. It will—remind me. That is all. I can remember the rest. Thank you, Barbara.'

And then, the bright excitement still in her eyes, but her manner suddenly quite calm, she spoke of other things, and said no more of this to me, while we walked as swiftly as we could along the Strand.

'I hope,' she said, her gentle tones sounding unutterably sorrowful to me after their late excitement, 'you are not like Rogers, Barry, and look upon the London streets as the graves of memory.'

I shook my head with a smile, for there was no need to tell Mary that, though I have Rogers' 'Italy' at home, beautifully bound, I did not know he had ever made that dismal little observation.

In the shadow of St. Clement's Church, Mary turned me aside to a paved court, the existence of which I should never have guessed, if left to myself. Behind the gates which kept it from the vulgar tread, a forgotten-looking man sat reading, and, though he was at first conscientiously unwilling to let us pass into the mystic region beyond him, he gravely let us in when Mary told him whom we sought. I think we both stepped softly, for there not only was a great hush in the narrow court, across which the two high masses of building seemed about to meet—but such a feeling of solitude that we might have left the noise and bustle of the Strand a hundred miles behind us. Throughout the length and breadth of the place (though the breadth was scarce worth mentioning) there was no one to be seen save a morbid child, who stood against the iron gate, staring up at two small cages, in one of which a blackbird fluttered restlessly in the heat with an evident headache, while in the other, watching him with anxious solicitude, a tiny canary sang cheerily as an encouragement. In her gentle way, Mary spoke to the child, who told us, with no smile, and without dropping her eyes from the birds, that she came every day 'out of the noise to listen.'

I looked furtively about me as we passed on, half expecting to be myself absorbed into the silent buildings. In one corner of the court a little wooden garden was suspended in the air, and the scent of dusty wallflower and mignonette in it was tempered by a shy, uncertain odour of sweetbrier from above, where the windows all seemed standing open in a flame of red geraniums.

In the shadowy room to which we were led, there sat a young man who recognised Mary in an instant. He had a high, narrow forehead, and did not look to me at all clever; but as Mary said he was, and I am no judge at all, of course he was. I sat down at the open window, thinking Mary would rather I were not near her, though she had asked me to go with her; but she gave me a smile before she began to speak, and I quite understood that it was meant to assure me she had no wish that I were not



present. I heard her ask this gentleman if he had not defended in a certain trial, and when he acknowledged having done so, as a junior, she begged him to answer her a few questions. I did not hear all she said ; I tried not to, but I heard him tell her it was through a friend, to whom the defence would have been entrusted had he not been just then leaving for India ; 'a very clear-sighted and popular barrister, who was so convinced that there were extenuating circumstances to be discovered that he would have gladly undertaken the case had it been possible. The circumstances were not eventually proved to be what he hoped, but still it was brought in manslaughter, which was'—after a pause—'something.'

I liked the man because he never smiled. I could not have borne him to do so, with Mary's anxious face before him.

'I being young in the profession,' he went on, 'and I hope conscientious, this friend named me for the defence, and strongly impressed me with his own belief in there being a possible solution to the mystery other than appeared upon the surface ; but I regret to say this hope was not realised. He instructed me himself, quite apart from the solicitor's instructions, before he left ; and we have often since talked over all the circumstances, he being still interested in them, and always a kind friend to the boy who now holds the property. This friend is coming in a few minutes to keep an appointment with me, and if you will wait, Miss Keveene, he will tell you more than I can concerning that part of the tragedy of which you wish to hear.'

So we sat waiting, I still looking out against the so-near opposite windows, and wondering how the flowers could bloom here just as they did under country skies, and Mary talking to this young barrister, who evidently tried hard to entertain her, until a bell rang, and he left us, with a few words of apology. In a few seconds he re-opened the door, saying,

'This is the friend of whom I have been speaking, Miss Keveene. I have not prepared him, lest I should detain you. He will set your mind at rest on any point. Miss Keveene, Mr. Vesey.'

'He will set your mind at rest on any point !'

How the words haunted me as I watched Denis meet the girl he loved ; for whom, as I saw instantly by the sudden haughty stillness of her face he could do nothing.

'May I *not* help you ?' he asked, in a quiet, anxious way, seeing the change in her.

'You cannot,' she answered, with a coldness so intense that I wondered how I could ever have called her cold before that moment.

Still, in his manly forbearance, he asked again :

'Let me do what I can to help you, Miss Keveene. What may I do ?'

‘Nothing,’ she answered, icily, and had risen now and was looking towards me, though I fancied she did not even see me.

‘Let me send Henry back to you, then,’ he pursued, patiently. You would have questioned him but for his foisting me upon you. Let him help you if I may not.’

‘I do not wish to question him now,’ said Mary, her voice quick and petulant, and childish, as I had never heard it before. ‘I was curious and ridiculous over a matter I had—read of; that was all. Will you come now, please, Barbara?’

I had risen before, expecting this summons from the moment when I had seen the effect upon her of Mr. Vesey’s entrance, but he stood before her, one hand extended in unconscious fervour.

‘If I can help you—not now alone, Mary,’—he scarcely seemed to know he was addressing her so, in his great earnestness—‘but at any time, I will do it. You believe me?’ His simple word was like an oath to him, and even for her to doubt him at that moment would have been impossible.

‘I do not understand,’ she said, a terribly dazed look gathering in her eyes, as they seemed to grow darker and darker in her white face. ‘Why should you feel that I need your help—or any man’s? There is nothing for anyone to do for me.’

He had drawn back a little proudly, but was looking now into her eyes with a strange dawning of some new light in his own. And he made no movement towards her, though even I could not help taking her hands in involuntary compassion, as she stood with his gaze upon her; her tearless eyes filled with misery, the breath coming silently, yet almost sobbingly, from her parted lips. Hand in hand we went to the door, but then I turned to Denis, who stood just where he had stepped back, and with the same awakening look. I could not help it. When Mary and I had passed through the door I turned suddenly, as if I had forgotten something, and went up to him for a moment.

‘Denis,’ I whispered, ‘I am with her, and I will let you know if she needs help.’

‘Needs help!’ he answered. ‘She needs it indeed—God’s help as well as man’s. I remember now where and when I have seen her. It has puzzled me so often; but I remembered all when I saw again that tearless misery in her eyes, and that confused, bewildered pause. Don’t forsake her. Go back and be a friend to her, dear Barbara.’

For a few moments I felt as if I were in a dream, even after rejoining Mary—it had taken so few moments after all!—but presently, by a great effort, I could speak naturally to her. Indeed this day I surprised myself for the first time in my life by my assumed ease.

‘I believe,’ I said, considering that I adroitly changed the

current of Mary's thoughts, 'it is five hours since we breakfasted.'

'Is not that strange !' said Mary, pointing to a board which I should never have noticed, whereon it said, *Into this inn no burdens are admitted, and no cries allowed.* 'If it were true that no burdens are admitted, Barbara, I could not have entered.'

'And if it were true that no cries are allowed,' I added, fancying I skilfully pursued my plan of arousing her. 'I should not either, for it fills my eyes with tears to see that aged child still here.'

'I see,' said Mary, softly. 'Stop, Barbara, and let us try to bring one child-like smile to the solemn face of this little creature who comes each day out of the world's din "to listen."'

We walked for quite half an hour in silence, and even swiftly, though the pavement was so often crowded; then Mary suddenly stopped, and broke her long, sad silence.

'Oh, Barbara, how selfish I am ! And we are not even on the way to our hotel : ' in some vague circuitous way we had reached the Haymarket now. 'What will you have ?'

'Only a cup of tea,' for my suggestion had merely been an excuse for a rest and change for Mary, and I knew we ought to keep what appetite we had for our return.

'Then come,' she said, and we went into a restaurant close beside us. Mary gave the modest order to an imposing lady with many golden curls and plaits, but I saw how absently she must have done so—she so always keen and observant !—when I found her quite insensible to the injured manner in which this lady haughtily transmitted the order to a 'Geo-arge' in the background. I knew by her tone we must have offended her, and I sought guiltily for a cause. In the window there was the legend 'Tea and coffee always ready ;' then our request could scarcely have been a shock to her. I tried to feel at ease again, while 'Geo-arge' kept us waiting, and, as Mary did not speak to me, I was obliged to study our surroundings. Then I became aware of the injury we had done to the golden-haired syren. On our entrance I had noticed a stout, merry-looking gentleman in clerical attire seated at the counter, and apparently half-way through a cup of coffee and a proposal of marriage; now he had turned his attention entirely to us—at least to Mary—and had evidently forgotten both his coffee and his enchantress. The look he gave Mary—who sat so quietly in her brown dress, utterly unaware of it—was a look of genuine involuntary interest; so frankly compassionate, as well as inquisitive, that it actually made me smile, not with any feeling of mirth, but with a quiet gladness that men could be so sympathetic. Shall I see the honest, kindly face ever again ?

I was so gravely pondering this, even after the clergyman had left, that when Mary spoke I started,

‘Barbara, are you sorry you came with me?’

‘No; very glad,’ I said, in my blunt way.

‘It is soon over; but, selfish as I am, I can be glad that you will be among your own people to-morrow.’

‘And you?’ I asked, timidly.

‘I have something to do. I have work that will take me away. First to——’

‘Yes, Mary?’ interrogatively, when she paused.

‘First to Devonshire.’

‘And I—may I not come?’

Again she gave that long wistful look into my poor dim eyes; then even her own were wet with unshed tears.

‘And you,’ she said, her lips a little tremulous, ‘ought not to come; yet—after that glance of trust in me—it almost breaks my heart to let you go, my Barbara.’

So I instantly decided not to leave her. She had borrowed a railway guide from ‘Geo-orge,’ and seemed to be studying it in quite a leisurely manner, when suddenly she closed it, and rose, looking at me with feverish eagerness.

‘Barbara, there is a fast train from Waterloo at 2.20. Will you come? Can we do it?’

‘Oh yes,’ I said, but only mechanically, for in her silence I had fallen into the mental composition of a letter to mother—it being a habit of mine to concoct in my head first the few letters I write.

We took a Hansom back to Morley’s, packed our bags, and then, while Mary was settling the bill, I wrote and sent three telegrams; one to mother from myself; one from Mary to her maid directing her to bring luggage for us both and take the train from Weymouth to Westercombe, going to the hotel which our waiter told us was *the* hotel of Westercombe, and there await us; and one to the hotel to secure rooms, but not to bespeak a private sitting-room, as Mary said she hoped we should to-morrow go on to Rocklands. We drove fast to Waterloo, without stopping for lunch; but taking a man with us who would secure seats and summon us at the last minute before the train left; for only on this condition would Mary run the risk of waiting for any refreshment before our journey.

There seemed very little vacant space left in the train as we made our way to where the man stood on guard at our carriage door, but our compartment was not full. A black-hooded sister sat in a reverie in the corner opposite me, and a fashionable young mother occupied the corner opposite Mary, while her child was temporarily settled near me. I had taken care to provide books and papers for the journey, for I knew that to Mary they would be a cloak for silence, and that it would rest her to be silent; and at once I took a book and buried myself in it, to show Mary that there was no expectation on my part of conversation on

hers. But as the child near me took occasion to slip off the seat about once in every two miles, and her mother was languidly engrossed in observation of Mary, I had occupation enough in picking her up.

The train sped through the summer landscape, and presently—the sun shining hotly in upon her—Mary drew her curtain, and closed her eyes. I saw the fashionable lady opposite her grow more interested now she could stare unhindered; but, in spite of the long lashes lying so still on the white cheeks, I knew Mary never slept, and understood the nervously suppressed excitement which made her so still. The gentle Sister opposite me dreamed on, with a sweet and patient indifference to us all; and my occupation continued unabated, though now there was less hope of an abiding result each time I replaced the child upon a seat. But when we reached Salisbury, and, having five or six minutes to stay, walked on the platform for a change, I knew how conscious Mary had been of us all. In just her usual way she jested me about the child, and then spoke with a sigh of the Sister of Charity.

‘What were her musings, Barbara? What dreams could make a face so patient? Was she back in a world that had once enthralled her, or very, very far away from it?’

‘I think she was warm,’ said I, placidly. ‘Her costume is very heavy for this weather.’

We found our companions still in the carriage, and had, therefore, the same occupations all the way to Exeter, where they left us. During the ten minutes we stayed at Queen Street Station we had tea, knowing we should not reach Westercombe until after nine; then we went on, still to all appearance reading and resting.

I remembered having heard much of the beauty of Westercombe from Denis, and told Mary so, when we left the train and saw that quite a cluster of tourists had alighted with us on the platform of this terminus; but Mary only answered listlessly that she had always heard it was a very favourite seaside resort.

A private omnibus took us down to the large hotel on its wide plateau among the cliffs, and there we supped together in a window of the coffee-room, thinking more of the sweet, dim view of sea and rocks, which we begged not to have shut out, than of the scene within. From the foreign waiter who attended on us, Mary learnt that a coach left Westercombe for Rocklands daily during the height of the season, while it only went twice a week earlier and later. He told us he thought that by sending up to the coach office early he could secure us the box seats, as, of course, we wished to thoroughly enjoy the scenery, did we not? Mary told him that we did, and he cheerfully undertook the commission, telling us the coach would call here in the morning for its passengers.

And now our busy day is at an end ; and though we retired early, and I was too wakeful not to be positively glad to have my diary to resort to, I will sleep now, that I may be fully rested against to-morrow.

Saturday, July 30th.

Our waiter seemed to consider that his success in having got us the seats he advised, gave him a special right over Mary, and he came out of his dignity to replace the ladder (quite unnecessarily) before he allowed her to climb to her seat. Many of the tourists and holiday-makers, who had filled the breakfast-tables in the coffee-room, had dispersed now, with rod and line, or sketch-book, or knapsack ; but the coach was filled too, and some stood watching the start from the wide gravel sweep before the hotel—a start which I must own the vehicle accomplished with great *éclat*, its horn blowing a challenge to any other coach to show such a goodly cargo, or a team more ardently resolved on doing its duty that day.

Certainly the dust swept over us—as well as round and round us—rather often, settling in every cranny, and only dumbly laughing, I suspect, to see us bend our heads and think we could thus elude its writhing embrace, and certainly by noon the sun beat fiercely down upon us ; but yet it was a glad, delightful drive. Now and then, with a very babel of tongues behind us, we rolled along the level road with its grass borders and fringe of waving beech, through which the summer sky was outlined by the heights of Exmoor, while our driver pointed vaguely with his whip, telling us all that that low wall encircled the great moor, breaking off to call to the brisk little lad who acted as our guard that Lorna had a stone in her shoe. A halt while the boy took the stone from Lorna, who stood as quietly as if she had not known she could have trodden the child to death in half a minute, sharp as he was ; and a dash down hill between high hedgerows, all their primness melted into beauty by the wanton, sweet embrace of loveliest wild blossoms. Then smoothly stealing up the Devon hills, the four brown horses pulling against each other generously, and the boy behind blowing lusty, unmelodious blasts upon his horn, as if beyond this hill a city lay expecting us and listening for this token. On under the bordering tassels of the woods, and out into the glare again ; then down into as sweet a valley as even this sweet land can know ; while now and then, upon our left, we caught a glimpse of the shimmering sea ; but too far off for its great voice to break the gentler sounds.

Alarming shouts from our driver to a cumbersome sheep lying helplessly upon its back in the pasture, and—they being unavailing—the dropping, without any slackening of the horses'

speed, of our lively little guard, who climbs the hedge, races across the meadow, sets the sheep upon his legs, and joins us, with honour, later on ; where Lorna and her brothers slake their thirst at last, and where a crowd of children surround the coach, holding baskets of flowers above their heads, dumbly persistent until all of us, who will, have taken a little bunch of cottage flowers and dropped a penny in exchange. On again, the horn blown shrilly, until we stop before a tiny cottage down a steep incline of vegetable garden, and our genial coachman lifts his cheery voice for the benefit of its inhabitants :

‘Come, Mary, have you got your mother’s dinner ready? Here she is!’

Hastily a smiling, grey-haired woman comes from the doorway, and runs up the garden path, wiping her hands upon her apron, an embodiment of the heartiest welcome I ever saw. Not one of us, clustered on the sunny roof of the coach, had ever supposed any human being was entombed in the solid body of the vehicle below us, until this merry woman opens the coach-door and rescues a very old woman, kisses her warmly on the steps, laughs her thanks and farewell, not only to the coachman, but to us all, and leads her mother indoors, her cheery voice following us upon our way.

Again and again, as we seemed to be nearing our destination, Mary led the coachman to speak of the neighbourhood ; but always her courage seemed to fail before she could ask any special question, until, after a marvellous blare, like a final explosion of the horn, we rolled majestically, and, as it were, with all our colours flying, up an abrupt ascent, and, with ineffable grace and elegance, were wheeled round, and stood, observed of all observers, before the great hotel upon the height at Rocklands. I looked to see the steps arranged for our descent, but they not only remained propped against the wall, but the ostler rested against them, contemplating us as he might a picture. Presently the reason of this was made clear to me, for we were requested to sit still for a few moments while the coach was photographed. I sat still, thinking what a pity Mary’s was not the outside figure, and amused a little by the ease with which our driver fell into an evidently accustomed attitude, the whip resting on his knee, and an affectionate gaze fixed upon the leaders’ heads, while the nimble little guard stood comically upright, a pillar of strength, with the horn fixed mutely to his lips.

It was when this operation was to all appearance satisfactorily concluded, that Mary—evidently intending to linger until the other passengers had descended—summoned courage at last to question the coachman as she wished : only myself, of course, being able to detect the tremulous hesitancy in her voice.

‘Do you know Rocklands well?’

Very well, he told her. All Westercombe people knew Rocklands. It was beautiful up the river, though all the passengers would be sure to stay about the cliffs and sands. The river road was the prettiest walk or drive about.

'Thank you, we will go,' said Mary, gently acquiescent in his natural interpretation of her question. 'It is a village then? I thought I had heard of Rocklands as a house only, belonging to—to a Mr. Discombe, I think.'

Oh, she meant the Manor, of course, then? That was nearly a couple of miles beyond the village, higher up the river. Yes, that was a pretty place too—quite worth seeing.

'Thank you,' said Mary again. 'Who owns it now?'

Young Mr. Discombe, she was told, a little less deliberately now that the coach was discharging its freight. He was a lad at Eton, and the place was to be let if anyone could be got to take it.

'Was it then—had it a bad name?'

There were some, he said, who could not forget there had been a murder done there; but he thought it great folly, for it was not at the house at all.

'No,' put in Mary, breathlessly; and I involuntarily took her hand in mine as we rose; 'it was in a summer house; a little tower called the Belvidere.'

She was right, the man said, giving it as his opinion that people were foolish who shunned the house itself because of that; and that we might go and see the place if we liked walking, and be back to the hotel for lunch: then take the cliff walk and see all Rocklands, before he was ready to leave at six.

'We may not be going back,' I put in, as Mary turned silently to me; and then we descended, and went straight away from the hotel entrance, walking in silence for a good while until I felt that I must break it, if only just to say what a pleasant drive we had had.

'And yet,' said Mary, absently, 'two ridiculous lines were all the time running in my head,

"Behind the postilion  
Sits care on a pillion."

Was it not absurd, when we were such a merry party? How beautiful it is here, Barbara, and how—restful. That cow lying on the shady hillside, and placidly chewing the cud, is a perfect symbol of rest, I think.'

'And the same spirit of rest,' said I—I am afraid, only making talk—'seems to animate everything.'

'Or rather *not* animate,' said Mary, smiling. 'The very silence is music, and don't you often feel that the country air upon your lips is Heaven's pure benediction?'

'You may imagine I have not much chance,' said I looking



from her uplifted face far off to where the meadows gently rose to meet the sky. 'The only bit of country easily obtainable at home is a hundred yards of the Duke's prim avenue at Chiswick.'

'But you have country within reach, Barry, surely, and woods! Can you have lived always away from the woods? They were my blessing. Oh, how I have wandered among them in the beautiful, thoughtful autumn weather, and found there——'

A sudden silence fell upon her then, and her gaze went away from me and grew absorbed, for I think she somehow knew that we were nearing the house she sought.

We had reached the river now, and down upon our left, between the steep and rugged banks, it rushed and sang and tossed along its stony bed: smoothly, yet in a wild excitement too; noisily, yet with softest sound to us: while on our right the summer woods bent over, sheltering our way, and giving us, in softest whispers, hints of the wonderful secrets that they held within their depths.

Presently the wood narrowed to a belt of trees, and we came upon a straight wide avenue, an old Tudor manor-house standing at its further end, with windows closed and shuttered jealously.

'This is the Manor,' said Mary, standing back a little from the bolted gate, as if she would not touch even that; and looking from the closed mansion to the lodge beside us, with its doors and windows also locked; 'I—recognise it. It is—or was—a lovely place to live in, and it has never had other lords than the Discombes. I—have heard of it,' answering my involuntary questioning glance. 'And that is the Belvidere, that square tower against the sky on the other side of the river. I know that, too. It is on the highest point of the heath, isn't it? It must—must look sheer down upon the river on one side.'

'Oh yes,' said I, ambiguously, for her words were as hurried as her step, while she led me on from the padlocked gates. 'We can reach it from here, if we cross that little wooden bridge. There is no edge or wall, and we can climb straight up, with only a little difficulty.'

'But there is a regular path,' said Mary. 'It will be further on, and a bridge and house near. I shall recognise that, too. I have read it all, you know; and the woman's name—I remember. But still we can go this way, Barry, as you discovered it.'

I followed her down the steep bank, wondering over her free, fearless step, and crossed what I had called a bridge, which was but a long, narrow plank laid across the stream. Then we climbed—I all out of breath from the unaccustomed exercise, but Mary, breathing unhurriedly as if the hills had been her birthplace—to the tower standing on the bald crown of the height which on three sides sloped downwards smoothly to the meadows and the woods, but on the fourth fell roughly and

jaggedly far down to the river's brim. Even to me there was a weird and eerie loneliness about the spot ; which even the view, so wide and beautiful, could not dispel ; but to Mary I could see that there was far more than that. She tried the door eagerly, then the one small window level with it, but both were fast. Then she stepped back, and examined the windows above. There were three, all as firmly closed as the one below ; the paint blistered, and cobwebs lurking in the corners. We could just see that, outside the one overlooking the river, there was a feeble wooden balcony, which might once have been a rustic adornment, but now added to the desolate look of the place, for its rail had been roughly broken and left unrepaired.

'What a forsaken spot !' said I, involuntarily. 'If I owned it, I would open it, and let the sun shine in.'

'No, you would not,' said Mary, gently. 'Barbara'—she called me suddenly, as she stood against the door, her hands clasped, her head bent back, listening—'there are steps within, and voices. What can it be ?'

'The wind,' said I, laying my prosiness like a quieting touch upon her nervous excitement. 'In such confinement, and on such a height, his voice makes all sorts of deceptive sounds. Listen to that faint, unearthly moaning ! Come away, do.'

'But we must go in,' said Mary, with an anxious glance at me. 'Shall you be afraid ?'

I might have smiled, of course, but could not, with those lovely, serious eyes upon me.

'Oh, to go in is different,' I said, remembering I only wished to cheer her. 'There will be no ghostly sounds within. We shall open the doors to the wind, and he will laugh instead of wail. But how are we to compass this entrance, Mary ?'

'That one before us will be the orthodox road,' she said, in a new tone, as if she shook off some oppressive thought. 'That will lead us to the bridge and to the house.'

We found it readily, a pleasant-looking little white house, with green shutters, which the sweet Devon roses, climbing about them, made quite useless. After only a moment's hesitation, we went through the green gate, along a gravelled walk, bordered so lavishly with snowy pinks among the gold and brown nasturtiums that their perfume filled the air, and knocked upon a green door. Before our knock was answered, a tall, dark woman came round from the side of the house, and told us she had seen us coming, but had been busy with her bees—putting them new caps, I think she said—and 'hadn't liked to leave 'em, for she'd had but poor speed with 'em so far.'

'Is this the Ladyhouse ?' asked Mary, in her pretty gentle way ; 'and are you Miss Angerona Brock ? I thought so,' as Miss Brock nodded, and stood expectant. 'Then have you not the key of the Belvidere, and could we not enter it ?'

'Well, I have the key,' allowed Miss Brock, reflectively, with shrewd, small eyes fixed on Mary's lovely face, 'and I would take a lodger of my own, say ; but 'tis not public.'

'Oh no,' said Mary, very humble in her anxiety, but alert as ever, 'and perhaps we have no right to ask ; but I had read of it. We are seeking lodgings, Miss Brock ; could you not take us in ?' ; 'I must, if 'tis lodgings you do want,' asserted Miss Brock, with a vain effort to be unconcerned. 'Mine is the only genteel house about here. Rocklands is sure to be full this time of year, an' 'tis purtier too up the river here, so most do think. My one parlour's let, but the other do happen to be void, though 'tis not usual, for we've tourers here so continual, and gentlemen after trout. Yes, I've the key of the Belvidere,' she added presently, going more cheerfully back to the subject after we had been shown into the 'void' parlour, and had had a discussion on terms, which pleased her, though Mary made it very brief, 'and I may lend it to my lodgers, but 'tis so rusty now that I must get something done to it before 'twill open any door. That'll take up a day. Dear me, I was never asked before—no, I b'lieve—to show the inside of the Belvidere since the p'lice shut it up. It is zackly as it was then, but Mr. Ernest will have it all changed or taken down. It has a whisht name, you see, and folks do have a horror of it, an' scarce ever go even near.'

'Will you tell us why?' asked Mary. 'Do you know the story ?'

'Who better ?' inquired Miss Angerona. 'This is the direct way to the Belvidere, an' I kept the key then. There isn't anyone knows it as well as I do belong to, sure-ly, an' I'll tell it, if you do want to hear it.'

And she did ; but, as it is impossible for me to give it in her Cornish way, I will merely write the little outlined story as it rests to-night in my memory. Miss Brock's father, a Cornish boatman, had once saved the life of the lady the late Mr. Discombe had married for his second wife, and out of gratitude to him she had, after his death, sent for Angerona here, furnished for her this house, which she had persuaded Mr. Discombe to settle upon her for life, and so enabled her to make a comfortable living.

'I always kept one key of the Belvidere,' she said, 'because Mrs. Discombe was forgetful, and, as she had to pass the Lady-house to reach the Belvidere, she could be sure of it from here ; and I went on keeping the key after she died. That was when Mr. Evlyn, the heir, was seventeen, and her own son, Mr. Ernest, seven years old ; he's the squire now, and owns all the property, though he's at Eton and wants to let the place. The squire changed a good deal after that ; p'raps it was, and p'raps it wasn't, because Mr. George Haslam was here so much. He was a younger brother of the squire's lady, and as his nephew, Mr. Ernest, was but a tool in his hands, he got the whole rule at

the Manor gradually, in a slow, mean way, for the squire wasn't himself, and we suppose it was then he made his new will, and left Mr. Ernest the place. At last one day—it must be just six years ago—there was a quarrel, and I s'pose the squire took Mr. Haslam's side; that shows how changed he is, for he used to be bound up in Mr. Evlyn; but he did, and Mr. Evlyn went away. He had his own mother's money, and, though it wasn't anything like what he'd a right to inherit, it was enough for him to live on, and he dropped all names but his mother's, so I b'lieve, and we knew nothing of him for three years. Then squire fell ill, and 'twas said he sent and sent for his son, and that Mr. Haslam stopped the messages, and though we shall never know the truth of that, everybody up at the Manor said it was true, especially when Mr. Evlyn came so quickly and lovingly at last, because Parson himself had traced and summoned him. But, for all his eagerness, then, he came too late.'

Here Miss Brock broke off to ask me, in a loud aside, whether my friend was faint; but I said feebly that the perfume of the pinks was rather oppressive through the open window; and while I closed it, and Mary leaned her head against it, I touched her cheek a moment with my lips.

'Yes, he came too late, unfortunately,' resumed Miss Brock. 'The squire had had a terrible stroke, and was speechless and unconscious; as dead as any living man could be. There was no quarrel then between his son and Mr. Haslam; it was too sad a time to Mr. Evlyn for him to mind that man. Yet everyone could tell afterwards—and many of them were made to tell in the court—how Mr. Evlyn treated him as if he was invisible to the eye or ear; never spoke to him or of him; never moved aside for him if they met—once even throwing him coolly down and walking over him, yet never even then seeming to see or hear him. That was in the spring of '78, and squire lingered days and weeks, scarce alive at all, and Mr. Haslam stayed at the Manor, as well as Mr. Evlyn. Mr. Evlyn had always been fond of the Belvidere, and indeed, even in his stepmother's time, it had been considered really as his room, and his things were in it; but he didn't go there often now, for he felt—or only hoped, p'raps—his father might wake to consciousness, and know him at the last. But one June day he came up here for the key of the Belvidere, and passed on rather hurriedly, telling me he had an appointment. I didn't understand, of course, but when I had to tell that at the trial, the judge knew at once that it was with Mr. Haslam he'd had the appointment up there, and of course it was, for Mr. Haslam passed up soon after him. I was down in Rocklands the rest of the day, and so didn't note that the key wasn't brought back, though I shouldn't anyhow, for often it wasn't returned to me the same day. But that evening, one of the keepers passing the Belvidere at dusk found

it open, and going to the upstairs room to speak to his master, as he fancied—the lower room is only an entrance—he saw nobody there but Mr. Haslam, shot dead and lying across the doorway. He found the window open, and the old rails freshly broken, and there below, on the stony edge of the river, Mr. Evlyn was lying insensible—his head had struck a stone. But he had escaped the water. Everybody said that after shooting Mr. Haslam he had intended to escape, and sprang from the window, forgetting the little wooden balcony, and had broken it in his eagerness—the rails were very rotten, and easily broken. They said of course he had intended to go through one of the other windows, from which he could have jumped so easily, but that he had been maddened by his conscience, and sprang from that window because it was the furthest from the dead body that lay across the doorway. I went up next day, and the blood hadn't sunk into the carpet—it never does, they say—and it has been a horrible place to me ever since.'

'Was no one else ever suspected of this murder?' asked Mary, very low.

'Never,' Miss Brock assured us, 'though the p'lice searched the country, and moved everything in the Belvidere. I'd a detective staying here a good while prowling night and day, searching every place, and everybody, and everything, because some people thought there might have been a third person there; but the notion had to be given up, it all was so clear. Hadn't they been always enemies, and hadn't Mr. Haslam been very unfair and aggravated Mr. Evlyn to the deed? And wasn't it Mr. Evlyn's own pistol that he kept in the Belvidere that had shot him, and wasn't its own bullet found in him? It was only too clear, and they said it was through some very clever barrister that Mr. Evlyn wasn't hanged, though it would have been all the same to the squire, for he knew nothing of all this, though he lived for some time.'

'No,' I said, feeling Miss Brock's stern little eyes questioning me, 'I suppose there is—was no hope of a third person being discovered.'

'No hope. I'm certain everything was done that could be done. If anybody else had passed to the Belvidere, I must have seen him.'

'But it can be reached easily without passing this house,' said I, remembering how we had come.

'Possibly,' Miss Brock allowed; 'but it would not be tried while this is the established path.'

'And all this would not have happened if the son had been allowed to come in time for his father to know him,' said Mary, and rose and looked around her: just as if she only studied the innumerable photographs of the manor—taken under every conceivable aspect—which adorned the walls. Then, evidently

for the purpose of getting rid of Miss Brock, she asked for lunch.

'Oh! Barbara,' she cried, when we were at last alone, 'I will find out this secret. There is some one for us to unmask. You will help me? We will clear the innocent, if——'

'If he be innocent, yes,' said I, practically, in her pause.

'I meant to say if—I die for it.'

Fortunately, as I thought, Miss Brock returned just then to present us with her card, and another bearing the name of the Rev. John Sladeley Gunn. 'The clergyman who enjoys my other parlour she explained, in a stately manner, with his two little boys. He's taking our parson's place for a time. He's liked very well, an' I heard him once, but I do mostly go to preachin'.'

'Does not he preach?' asked Mary, in her quiet humorous way though of course she understood.

'Preach, yes, that grammatical that we do ought to take dictionaries. But 'tis beautiful to hear him read about Daniel. Daniel answers quite plain from far away in the lion's den. If he preached in two or three voices like that, he'd have large congregations, yes, I b'lieve. He do try to make me a church-goer, but I tell him we're best mixed, like our tea. But he does talk, talk, talk. 'Tis a comfort to think he won't die with anythin' on his mind, less he's took very sudden.'

'I don't think, Mary,' said I, to rouse her, when Miss Brock had left us, 'that she either will die with much on her mind unsaid——' but I saw that Mary did not even hear me.

'Oh, Barry,' she sighed, as she still sat against the window, 'who can have come to the tower on that day and done such a deed? How can we learn this terrible secret, with no clue at all, however faint?'

'I don't know,' I said, heavily, staring at the varied representations of the Manor, photographed with startling truth and ugliness. 'I cannot see the narrowest ray of hope.' And it was just as I said it, with my eyes fixed upon a delineation of the avenue unbiassed by perspective, that there darted into my mind—no; nothing ever darted into my mind—that a struggling fancy began to take hold of me; and took it more and more firmly through every minute, until it was a haunting, harassing idea, which I determined to set at rest, whatever trouble the doing so should cost me. So absorbing had it become by the time Miss Brock, in her deliberate manner, had removed the cloth, and feelingly inquired if we had not found the cold beef 'of a pretty savour,' that, though I knew it to be but a feeble step, I was wrought up to invention in my determination to carry it out.

'As I need a little solitary walk to get my ideas clear, Mary, and you are anxious to discourse Miss Brock, I shall go to Rock

lands, and send a note to Silla by the return coach. Is she to come out to you to-morrow ?'

'Oh, Barry, we do not want her here,' said Mary, blankly. 'Yet,' she added, her own kind, thoughtful self again, 'she must not stay at Westercombe alone, and—Miss Brock will have her. Thank you, Barbara.' And then her head went back against the lattice-panes, and I felt ashamed of my paltering.

I did not leave her until I had only time to catch the coach before its return, and then I hastened away, repeating to myself all along the road to Rocklands the date of that murder, which I had looked back into my diary to learn. The coach was just leaving when I reached the hotel, and our genial driver touched his hat when he saw me, and said I was only just in time. When I had given him the note for Silla, I asked him, weighing every word, in my usual manner, whether it had long been customary to photograph the coach, and, if so, whether the photographs could be seen.

He told me with natural pride that it had been done for about four years, and most of the copies were sold at the time, but that one was always kept at the hotel, and, though they sometimes sold them after, sometimes they did not, and so I should find plenty, for the coach ran daily from the middle of June to the middle of August, and twice a week for a short time before and after.

'Of course I wish to buy the one taken to-day,' said I, 'but I should like to see the others.'

The men-servants of the hotel stood about to watch the coach depart, and I found, too, that another coach was expected from one of the Great Western stations ; so I felt it better to delay my errand, for fear of not doing it so well in the confusion. As I stood, with what patience I might, I became aware of two little boys, hand in hand in the road, evidently awaiting some arrival ; and then of their being paternally reprimanded by our driver as 'venturesome,' and, under this reproof, backing towards the hedge, and standing there, still hand in hand, and still hopefully expectant. They were sturdy, thick-set little fellows, with bare, brown legs, and dusty boots and socks, yet there was to me a quaint nobility in their little sunburnt faces ; the big black eyes were so ridiculously intrepid, the lips so babyish. As I watched, my heart went so strangely out to them that at last I went up and asked them if they were waiting for anyone. The smaller child—he was only very little the smaller—eyed me with a sort of phlegmatic sternness, evidently questioning my right to address him at all, though not moved to anger ; but the other with a glance of superiority at his brother, politely informed me that they were waiting for 'John.'

'Oh, for *John* !' said I, with the air of friendliness which is supposed to be acceptable to children. 'And who are you ?'

'I'm Trot,' said the little fellow, with a look in his large deep-set eyes which said, pensively, 'I'm a great man where I come from, but I drop my greatness here.'

'And you?' I asked, touching the shoulder of the smaller boy. He looked back at me with an immovably serene apathy which made me colour over the liberty I had taken, and feel grateful that he did not resent it actively.

'He's Nap,' said his brother, giving the hand he held a little corrective pull; 'and he's fell down. He always does when he's got his best frock on.'

'Oh,' said I, relieved to find in Nap's fixed wide open gaze the fact that even his brother's condescension to me did not disturb his equanimity; and then I smiled weakly but well meaningly upon the little fellows, and wondered whether there was anything else that I could say. But I could not find that there was, while those four great black eyes scrutinised me impartially.

I had forgotten the departing and arriving vehicles, when there came up to the boys—and therefore to me—some one whom I had surely seen before: a stout little clergyman with a good and kindly face. He held out to the eager children one plump white hand, while with the other he raised his hat to me, and in a moment I was aware that he recognised me, and that he was going to introduce himself to me, not only with the consciousness of a clergyman's right to do so, but in a cheery, friendly way that was perfectly courteous.

'This is strange! We met yesterday in a London restaurant, and though I have travelled hard all day I find you here before me.'

'We came yesterday to Westercombe straight from—where you saw us,' I said, unable to resent the simple, unconstrained address. Not until I was going over this conversation afterwards—as I invariably do to my disappointment and weariness—did it strike me that this was a bold acknowledgment of my having noticed him, for he did not show the faintest sign of thinking it so. 'You must have come by a very fast train to-day.'

'The Flying Dutchman,' he said, with a pleasant laugh, 'and I have decided with myself that if David had lived in the year of the world 1881, instead of desiring the wings of a dove, he would have said, I'll catch the Flying Dutchman and flee away. How kind of you to be taking a passing interest in my little lads, who are very naughty to be here at all. Their father is very grateful, I assure you.'

'But,' I said, in my slowly comprehending way, 'they said they were waiting for "John."'

'That's myself,' he answered, with a look of the tenderest merriment down upon the children. 'Their filial piety is remarkable. I ought to tell you I am taking duty here for a time, and we lodge at the Ladyhouse.'



‘So do we,’ I said, in my shy, scant way ; my thoughts at last clasping the fact that this was the ventriloquial clergyman who was so successful with Daniel in the lion’s den, but who preached too grammatically.

‘That’s right,’ he answered, in his cordial way. ‘It is a pleasant house, and Miss Angerona—I like that simple name, and use it in preference to Brock—with her Cornish words and ways, is amusingly un-English.’

Then we parted. He had asked me if he might walk back with me, but, though I knew it would be pleasant to have congenial companionship on my way, I feared I might unconsciously hasten or perform my errand superficially if I felt I was detaining anyone, so declined ; telling him I had business in the hotel. As he went on his way, with one sturdy little fellow pulling at each hand, I just momentarily wondered whether Mary had observed him in London, and would recognise him ; half wishing I could have been present to see the renewal of that strange, prompt interest he had taken in her. Then I utterly forgot him as I entered the hotel.

The manager took me to the drawing-room, and brought me some books that looked like scrap-books, where he told me I should find the photographs I spoke of ; each season having a collection to itself, and each book being dated. I feel quite sure it was because he saw how childish my fingers trembled over finding the date I wanted, that he left me alone to my task. The great room was unoccupied then, save by my own insignificant person, and I paused with a half smile at myself, for my plan suddenly looked to me futile and even imbecile. What had I been expecting to discover ? Even if I found out who were the passengers to Rocklands on the day of that murder, could that discovery give the slenderest clue to any possible murderer ? What a poor frail hope mine was, and how characteristic of me, after all.

This honest disdain of my own intellect roused me to act, but, with a new unhopeful carelessness, I took up the book dated 1878, and turned its leaves slowly to June 27th. There were several blank pages in the book, but that page was not blank. There stood the coach, two or three pigmy human figures standing down upon the ground beside it to show off its loftiness and its importance ; and the four horses, apparently very fiery, but held in check by the driver’s infinite skill. It was exactly like the photograph of to-day, except that the coach was but sparsely loaded. Beside the coachman who had driven us to-day sat one gentleman ; behind them two gentlemen and one lady ; behind again only the juvenile guard who had been with us to-day—I knew him in a moment, and scarcely was surprised that three years ago he looked no smaller and no younger than he looked to-day ! There were but four faces then for me to

fix upon my mind, so I studied them slowly one by one. On the box a boyish, frank-looking young fellow, with fishing rod and basket ; on the seat behind, an elderly gentleman of great size ; an evidently foreign artist, with flowing locks and beard, holding a sketching portfolio conspicuously ; and between them one lady——

Half an hour later, I shook off the strange mist that had enshrouded me, and started on my homeward walk, unutterably lonely and heartsick, fighting strenuously and zealously against suspicion and mistrust, longing with great intensity for the opportunity to speak one word to Denis now. All the time keeping my eyes turned from the river, because the sunset threw strange red stains upon it as it came on towards me from below that tower on the heath ; and dreading beyond all words my meeting with the girl whom I—against my better judgment, I had often told myself before this day—had grown to love so well. For the photograph had shown me that one of the passengers to Rocklands on the day of that murder in the Belvidere had been Mary Keveene herself !

Sunday, July 31st.

I rose this morning with the same vague feeling of mistrust against which I had so persistently, yet vainly, struggled last night ; with the same hatred of myself for this distrust, and yet with the same cowardly dread of hearing Mary mention anything connected with that day of the murder three years ago. I had not looked again at the photograph I bought last evening, but yet it seemed to be before my eyes all through the wakeful night.

I only waited for the eastern light to climb the hills and bring a tender smile upon the western sea, before I rose, grateful in my heart for the country sounds, and sights, and scents around me. This was so different from our Chiswick home, with the red houses close upon us before and behind, and hand in hand with us on either side. So different even from the tame view of sea, and long parade, and fashionable crowd which had been our idea of summer holidays. Oh, the joy and gladness of the summer Sunday morning in this fair, sweet, untamed land !

My lattice window was wide open while I dressed, and the Devon roses nodded in and cheered me, making me forget the harassed wakefulness of the past night. Then I leaned through to drink a deeper draught of the new joy and freshness of the morning, and, doing so, I saw two children standing hand in hand upon the doorstep. I waited—smiling to see the little fellows expectant, just as they had been when I had seen them

first—until I heard a strong, swift step upon the road; the click of the little gate; and then a voice, half laughing, half scarifying—‘Go in! go in! You’ll certainly catch the worm if you’re out so early.’ Then little pattering, hastening, eager steps down the garden path, a merry call to ‘John,’ and, following that, a trio of laughter down below the roses. I did not look out again, nor did I hurry over dressing; somehow I felt more content, less lonely and uneasy. I had thought myself early—as I certainly was, compared with our Sunday morning appearances at home—but, when I went downstairs, I found Mary sitting at our parlour window, looking as if she had been down for hours. All through breakfast I fought with this new painful restraint that held me in her presence; but the fight grew easier and easier, as I saw that she herself had had little or no sleep, and yet that she so tenderly devoted herself to me, coaxing me to eat, and saying unsuspiciously that she could see I had had what Silla calls ‘bad rest;’ talking brightly to me, as if no shadow dimmed her own awaking.

‘Listen!’ I said, as through our open window came the chime of the village bells. ‘You will go to church, Mary?’

‘I should like to go,’ she said, looking absently far down the river’s track, ‘if it is not wrong to go only for the sake of a rest.’

I would have told her I thought it good to know that rest was to be won there, but I am so awkward, and never can say properly, or in time, what I mean.

‘If you do not mind, Mary,’ said I, as, going upstairs together, we paused at the sound of the children’s arguments—I had seen Mr. Gunn go to the school some time before, and, if I had not, should have known he was absent by the different tone in his children’s voices, for their nurse was a rather incapable as well as dismal young woman, with her face wrapped up in a most depressing manner—‘we will take those little boys. Their nurse will not undertake it—Mr. Gunn said so last night—and it is such a pity to hear them fretting here.’

Their delight over this project may have been great, but their evidence of it was measured. Trot’s lofty excellence could not stoop to more than a brief, sweet smile, while Nap’s stoicism was entirely and perfectly impenetrable. They were dressed with willingness by the maid, who was apparently delighted at the prospect of being for a time released from what possibly weighed upon her mind as a responsibility, and we soon set off. Nap, having on a fresh little white tunic, took occasion to tumble down in the dustiest bit of the road, and wore a most impaired appearance afterwards; but, except for this diversion, we reached the church in safety and in time. But I can freely confess now that the service was an ordeal

to me through which I have no wish to pass again, at present ; for there had been a sort of tacit understanding between us that Mary should have charge of Trot, and I of Nap, and envy ate my heart away through every minute of the service. Trot's saintly bearing was perfect, and his devout and concentrated contemplation of the congregation certainly was all that Mary could have desired ; but to be custodian of Nap I found to be a task not equally light. For a time he gave himself up to a thorough and unhindered investigation of everything, from the height of the seat on which I had perched him, then fell into a steady unintermittent regard of my features, his head turned that he might comfortably conduct it, and that solemn, and yet half humorous gaze of his growing more steadfast as I writhed under it. I tried touching him, as if accidentally, with the end of my sturdy white umbrella, and I tried smiling sweetly into his face, but nothing disturbed him. With enviable presistence and firmness he, unmoved, continued his grave study of my face. I knew I should presently have to take the child out of church, and I was very sorry, for the simple country service was good for me. I tried to forget him, and for this purpose I looked about me. Then it was I noticed that almost everyone seemed to be regarding Mary. I wondered what the rustics thought of his lovely face, and what the few fashionably attired visitors thought of the plain brown dress, but I wondered more what Mr. Gunn thought when he turned his eyes so often to the beautiful lifted ones beside me ; and then, I am sorry to say, I fell to thinking how terrible my dull complexion would look in that brown suit of Mary's. This had been a little respite, and surely the sermon was half over now ! Just then, as I hoped this and yet feared it, for the words were like fresh air to me, Mr. Gunn quoted a few lines which I was certain I had seen or heard before—

‘Till the stars grow old,  
And the moon grows cold,  
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold.’

Instead of listening further, I was hunting through the chambers of my memory for the source of this, and finally fancied that an American poet had written what he was pleased to call a Moorish love-song, in which he vows to love the queen of his affections until the period therein indicated. I have heard many poets quoted in the pulpit, but the Moorish love-song is a new experience. Through this brief recess Nap's scrutiny never wavered. I saw Mary smile at last, and I tried to do so too ; but it was heavy work under that close investigation, and I had lost my fleeting bravery, and was just succumbing, when (to my relief) Nap turned his head to the

pulpit. But, after a grave contemplation of his father there, he clearly and loudly broke the silence of the congregation—

‘Come home now, John.’

My horror can only feebly be described when this infant in my care—actually held at the moment within my encircling arm—tendered this friendly counsel to our pastor, with such an evident conviction of its wisdom and such stolid contempt for its repression. In a panic I put my fingers on the little pouting lips, and, avoiding a glance either at Mr. Gunn or at Mary, took the child out of church, hating myself for having been the cause of this extraordinary address to the pulpit. But I had no idea what reproof to administer, or how to improve the occasion, so—weakly silent myself—I let him walk stolidly beside me, until he tumbled down. After that, I—still more weakly—carried him, for I was glad to hasten home, give him up to his nurse, and hide my own diminished head.

No words can tell how apprehensively I awaited the return of Mr. Gunn, and was quite grateful to Miss Brock for happening to be in our room, laying the cloth for our early dinner.

‘Twas a pity you had the trouble of ’em,’ she observed, alluding to the little lads, ‘but that nurse ain’t much. She’s always feelin’—like Peter did when he sat at the gate of the temple weepin’—just mazed wi’ toothache. I can’t say it do surprise me, for her bonnet ain’t nought but a limpet shell ’pon top of her head.’

‘But it is such fine warm weather,’ suggested I, meekly, wondering what my bonnet looked like in Miss Angerona’s eyes.

‘Oh, yes, the weather’s handsome, sure ’nuff,’ she allowed. ‘We get a fine passel of mercies we do never stop to count up. The Almighty is fine and good to us one way and ’nother; and that girl, though she’s ben poorly all mornin’, is purty clever again now. Lor’, miss, we must all of us feel slight now and then. Now, I do hope you two’ll eat some dinner to-day, for the meat do go poor this weather if ’tisn’t eaten. I’ve got the key of the Belvidere usable now, and you shall have it this afternoon. What time shall you want tea?’

‘Any time that will suit you best,’ I said, acting on Mary’s principle.

‘Lor’, miss, never mind,’ said Miss Brock, cordially. ‘If you’re late, the girl will wait on you all right; for I do mostly go to chapel in evenin’s. I do very often have a bit o’ nap in the afternoons, an’ then I do like to go to preachin’ in the evenin’, cause I can sleep so much better after bein’ out a bit.’

Just then I saw Mr. Gunn come up the garden with Mary—Trot walking in advance—and I felt thankful to be sheltered in our own room; but my heart fell when Mary actually brought him straight in with her, telling me he would not be denied thanking me for my enterprise. His hearty laugh over our ad-

venture did me good, and then, while he idled in our low parlour, giving it a curious homeliness, I thought, I told them, with an imitation of Miss Brock's Cornish, her last speech to me.

'A rather original reason for attending Divine worship,' said Mr. Gunn, with his pleasant laugh. 'It reminds me of a motive given by one of her countrymen to tardy almsgivers to provoke them to good works—an old friend of mine heard it. A missionary meeting was held at Porthleven, and the necessity of sending the Gospel to the heathen in foreign parts was strongly urged. One good brother who belonged to Porthleven, and knew a great deal of local politics, concluded his oration thusly:—"I do hope, friends, that there'll be a good collection, and I think you did ought to come out liberal *this* year, for the fishin' han't been bad, and you have had two *very good wrecks*."'

'The heathen in foreign parts were their brothers indeed,' laughed Mary, and by that time my apprehension had worn off, and I had almost forgotten my ignominious exit from church.

Presently Mary called the children in, and in her pretty, easy way, amused and played with them, trying to make me do so too, but I could not, for I could not sufficiently forget myself. I was not astonished that Mr. Gunn looked with such quiet, intense pleasure at her, and so forbearingly left unnoticed my awkward advances; yet he specially addressed me before he left, to pretend he did not see my discomfiture.

'Nap is not the only child in Rocklands who has covered himself with glory to-day, Miss Oswald,' he said, with a smile for me, and a kind touch upon his boy's hair. 'There was a brisk little girl in the school who told me Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by brimstone and treacle.' Then he went away laughing, and left us far more ready for dinner than we should have been.

When it was over, Miss Brock brought in the key of the Belvidere (not very shining), and we strolled out. I paused in the garden, fancying Mary would like to visit the tower alone, but she looked at me wistfully.

'You will come, Barry?'

'Oh, yes,' I said, quite naturally, the moment I saw it was what she wished. 'You cannot get rid of me now you have brought me so far, Mary. We shall have a delightful walk, for it is indeed what Miss Angerona called "handsome weather sure 'nuff".'

Yet, for all my studied unconstraint, I found, as we went on, I could not throw from my mind its great anxiety. As we neared the Belvidere, I talked to Mary on irrelevant matters; but this was always an effort to me, and defeated its own ends. I began to think it as impossible for me to still my doubts, vague as they were, as to stop the motion in the spikelets of quaking grass I gathered; so I fell into silence just as she had done, and

stood turned away from her, looking down upon the purple slope of moorland, while she fitted the key in the lock, and opened the door; for I seemed to understand so well the trembling of her fingers over the task. Then I followed her, lazily as I could seem to do, into the tower, and up the few stairs which led straight from the lower room—evidently only an entrance, as Miss Brock had said—into the upper one, which, in spite of its desolate, unvisited look, was a very strong contrast.

Intentionally averting my eyes from Mary, I inspected the room. There was a small window on each of the three sides, and beyond the one over the river I saw the broken rails still standing; ugly reminders of the tragedy this little place (built for pleasure) had witnessed. Below each window was a semi-circular little bracket-table. On one stood an old-fashioned ruby claret-glass, on one a well-worn blotting-book and inkstand; and on the other a heavy, antique tobacco-jar. But what added greatly to the furnished look of the room was the fact that the door was lined with book-shelves, so well filled that to close it behind us was quite a labour; but when we had done so the whole character of the room was changed, even though below it, upon the dark green carpet lay that great stain so visible still!

I was examining everything in this slow, deliberate way; partly to avoid a glance at Mary, and partly to avoid a thought of what she felt, or even a remembrance of that mystery between us, when her voice startled me, it was so oddly strained and perplexed.

‘Barbara, I have such a strange, strange feeling! I cannot understand it. Did you ever enter a room that you seemed to know? Did you ever seem to have been in a place before, and yet not know you have? What is it? I seem to have been here before, but on a different day, a misty, brooding day. I know the scene. The bridge down there, the river, the bank, the heather, the road beyond. Even one sheltered spot where the Mayweed is in blossom—yet it is so late for that. Yes, it was late, I remember, then. And the river sobbed and wailed. How do I know that, when to-day it is so glad and swift? Listen! is not the water rushing merrily in summer gladness? Barbara, what does it mean? Have I been—mad?’

‘My dear,’ I cried, putting my arms about her, and softly kissing her white cheek, trying vainly, I fear, to hide from her the fact that I was frightened, ‘come home now. This is a chill, damp, uninhabited, uncomfortable, unsociable place;’ for I scarcely knew what to urge to entice her away, while there came back to me that insane longing for Denis, as if he were the only one who could help her now or advise me.

‘Yes,’ said Mary, repeating my words in a slow, confused way, ‘it is a chill, damp, cruel place, but it is not that—oppresses me. It is—a dream, I think. Can it be? What is it

that I cannot grasp? Barbara'—in an eager, intense whisper, her eyes wild and feverish in her pale face—'I—recognise this room, and yet I do not. Tell me what we came for. Was it'—dazedly looking round—'to gain some clue to—who was here with Evlyn? Did we say that appointment he came to keep was not with the man who was murdered? I forget. But if it is not a dream—look on that upper shelf, Barbara, and I think all the volumes will be'—her hand upon her side, as if in pain—'“State Trials.”'

'No, I will not, Mary,' said I, sturdily. 'I hate dreams to be remembered. They are all nonsense and indigestion and untruth. This wretched room makes my head ache, and I shall faint if you keep me here.' I never have fainted in my life, and have not the slightest idea with what sensation it begins, but I could not help this excuse, as I laid my fingers soothingly for a moment on her wide, bewildered eyes.

'I am so sorry, Barbara,' she said, in her sweet, pityful tones. 'Come away. I am selfish to have kept you. You are right. Let us shake off the horror of this place, dear. I was forgetting it was Sunday. Why did we choose to-day? Now come back to our own quiet rooms, and you will play to me, won't you?'

'Yes,' said I, shakily; for it occurred to me that my music would scarcely soothe her, and how few things I could play without notes, only two or three showy pieces of a boisterous and tumultuous character, learned to perform at any party where I had no help for it, and I thought of the last one, and how, if she asked me what it was, it would not sound soothing to say, 'Valse Caprice, by Tschaikowsky, op. 4.'

I found myself repeating this tranquillising explanation again and again, as—still with my affected headache and faintness—I decoyed Mary from the Belvidere, without having allowed her to discover what books occupied the upper one of these curious bookshelves.

But when we reached the Ladyhouse a great surprise awaited us—and yet somehow it seems now as if it could have been no surprise to me—for Denis was there! What a different aspect everything had to me then! And yet I saw, below all his courteously cheerful entertainment of us, that there was upon him—as there had been and still was upon me—a restraint against which he almost vainly contended. My own vague uneasiness had increased tenfold since I had witnessed that strange mood of Mary's in the Belvidere, and I am afraid I watched her in a troubled way, though I really did try not to do so. I fancied Denis did so too; but it was quite plain to me that she was not aware of this. At first I thought she looked vexed to see Denis, but afterwards it struck me she was glad he had found us.

As for him, unrestful though he certainly was, even I, dull as I am, could not mistake the fact that it was a delight to him to



be once more in her presence, and that his eyes never grew weary of following her. During tea (and we all seemed determined to idle over our country tea) I had wondered whether the conversation would touch upon the motive of our visit here; scarce knowing whether I hoped or feared it; but when the lingering meal was over, and Denis had followed Mary to the old-fashioned seat in the lattice window, which was her favourite lounge, he set my mind at rest, just in his usually straightforward, direct way.

‘My father’s place, Miss Keveene, is not far from here. I mean the place that was my father’s. He sold it.’

‘What a pity,’ said Mary, listlessly; and I fancied she had forgotten all I had told her about Denis paying his father’s debts; but of course I had not told her old Mr. Vesey had sold the place without even consulting his son.

‘And I used,’ he went on—and I saw that he was steadily regarding Mary, as he sat beside her—‘to pass this house sometimes, and ride under that little Belvidere on the height. But that was before the murder which made the spot shunned and avoided. Strange to say, I have never been within sight of it since the evening of that day.’

‘What day?’ asked Mary, very white, and still, and cold.

‘The day that George Haslam was murdered in that tower.’

‘How strange!’ said Mary. ‘Did you know this Mr. Haslam?’

I did a little, and, though so little, quite enough to make me anxious that the boy, who is now owner of Rocklands Manor, should break from his guidance. Since Haslam’s death, the lad has been a different fellow. I often see him—he is at Eton now—and rejoice to feel that he will be such a man as I hear that his father was years ago. It is a vile thing to say a word against the dead, but Haslam’s influence, if Ernest Discombe could not have been saved from it, would have ruined the lad as it ruined the happiness of his father and brother. Miss Keveene,’ he went on, more earnest in his quiet way than I think I had ever seen him, and his eyes so kind and anxious, ‘I was almost painfully interested in the circumstances of the murder. I had to go to India just after it occurred, else I should have striven in the trial to do something towards solving the mystery which I feel sure still exists. I would like to do so.’

‘It is too late for you, Mr. Vesey,’ said Mary, lifting her lashes for one swift gaze into his face. ‘You say you passed here on the day of the murder. Think what might have been if you had made a discovery then! Now your turn has passed, and it is mine.’

‘If so, Mary,’ said Denis, in a new, relieved tone, as if at last he had heard her utter words he had been longing for; ‘let me help you.’

'Help me?' she said, with a swift, sad laugh, and rose as she spoke. 'I need no help—no other help. I have my generous, faithful Barbara. Didn't you promise to play to me, Barbara? Do, for I am so weary of the water's sound.'

I glanced at Denis, a little alarmed, I fear, for the water's sound could not be heard from the Ladyhouse, and I dare say I glanced appealingly too (as I felt), for he understood.

'May I play instead?' he asked simply, and even he could not help seeing Mary's grateful look, and must have felt pleased.

Some of the things he played I knew, but most of them I did not even wish to know. It was pleasure enough to listen to the dreamy beautiful thoughts he knew so well how to utter, and to see that even for Mary this indeed was rest. Once long ago Denis had laughed at me when I was wondering over his having learned so much music off book, and told me that what he loved he could not help making his own, but I do not think I had ever heard his music sound just as it did this evening. It was while he was playing one of the bits I recognised, a plaintive Sarabande of Handel's, and my eyes were absently wandering from one to another of the photographs of Rocklands Manor surrounding us, that I quite suddenly, as it seemed to me, and not in my usually gradual, deliberate way, decided to tell Denis of Mary's recognition of the convict on Portland Island, and to show him the photograph I had purchased of the coach and its passengers to Rocklands on the day of the murder. I went on pondering this decision in my ridiculously unstable way till the music ceased, after a beautiful slow movement of Clementi's which left the tears in my eyes.

'You played Bach chiefly, did you not?' said Mary, as he joined her, speaking unconcernedly, yet I saw that she looked through a mist of tears which she resolutely kept from falling. 'Is not *bach* the German for *brook*, yet his music is not so like its blithesome merry flow as—as an ocean of peace and power.'

'It is wholesome music,' said I lamely, glad to turn away from the harassing effect of those photographs in the dusk.

'It is wise music,' said Mary, absently; and Denis smiled as he sat down by her. He talked to both of us, but his voice grew low with untold tenderness when he addressed Mary, and presently I decided I would go out and await him, that I might be certain of the opportunity to speak to him alone.

I went upstairs for the photograph and a shawl, and, as Miss Brock's mansion is not on a very extensive scale, I could not help being aware that there was something wrong in the children's room, and that the nurse had wilily set the door wide open, either to silence a refractory mortal through his dread of publicity, or to entrap any passer-by into acting unconscious beetle. As I passed she looked up with fairly well assumed surprise and

awe, and cried, 'Oh, Nap, here's one of the ladies! She'll cry to see you so naughty.'

I cannot say I could readily have done so, even for the glorious result of Nap's conversion, but I could still less have done so a moment later, seeing his instantly awakened, hopeful anticipation of this result. He would evidently have enjoyed the sight of tears in my eyes, and his study of my countenance grew for him appallingly lively. I was far too conscious of my own inability to improve the occasion to venture within or question the child's nurse on what was wrong; but Trot met me thoughtfully, and in his sweetly superior manner informed me of Nap's transgression.

'He won't say his prayers, and John said we were to go to bed before he came home. I've said mine, and if Nap doesn't he won't be the boy the Good Lord loves.'

'I don't care,' said Nap, in his soft apathetic tones. 'I'll be the boy the Bad Lord loves.'

What could I say? I should, I fear, positively have kissed one chubby little stolid cheek if I had stayed, so with a feebly murmured moralising that I hoped they would not hear—for I knew that though Trot would pardon it, Nap would sturdily despise me for it—I escaped.

Having got my cloak and the photograph, I went slowly down stairs, and then, thinking Denis might await my return to bid me good night, and so frustrate my plan, I opened the sitting-room door to tell him, but softly, because he was singing, and I would not disturb them. So I heard the conclusion of the song—

I dream of thee  
When evening shadows on the streamlet play,  
When softly fades the golden light of day,  
When the sweet moon glides slowly on her way,  
Then, love, I dream of thee!

I dream of thee  
With anxious longing and with timid fear,  
Yet with sweet pain in every starting tear;  
Thou couldst not be more loved, nor be less dear:  
Thus, love, I dream of thee!

'I have taken that freely from the German, have I not, Miss Keveene?' Denis said, 'and the melody is Schubert's, because it seemed to fit so wonderfully. Mean of me, wasn't it? But I could not resist singing that—to you, Sunday though it be.'

'You should not to me,' said Mary, quietly. 'To anyone but me. I have valued your friendship—I have, indeed, though I have seemed to—but I wish you had never offered me more.'

And, before I had time to speak, just like the knight he had once spoken of—'who loved one only, and who clave to her'—he stooped, and touched her hand with his lips.

Without a word I left the room again, then spoke in cheerfully as I reached the open window: 'Denis, I am going for a little constitutional. You will pass me on your way out, and I can bid you good night then.' So, with a nod, I went.

What a tender sweetness there was in the twilight! Somehow, when Mr. Guan came up to me on the bridge, it seemed as if our natures have their twilight hours too; for the blaze of his sunny merriment had passed, and his words and manner had the peaceful quietness of the twilight scene around us. He asked at once for my friend—of course his first thought would be for Mary—and then he asked, but with no inquisitiveness, whether we had been to church, and when I answered in the negative, there was not in his voice the faintest implied reproach. He told me pleasantly of the very small congregation he had had in this sparsely-peopled spot; and how he had had to pull himself up when he caught himself saying, 'many of you will remember,' etc. But he did not go in then, and as I did not like to turn aside, because of missing Denis, nor to go back for fear Mary herself should stroll with him as far as the gate, we walked slowly to and fro, backwards and forwards, on the bridge, while the twilight paled and paled, and between the grand, dark, scattered clouds the stars came slowly forth. I do not know what he said, but I know it was all good, and wide, and charitable, and I like to think my empty years have held that peaceful hour.

He went in only when he heard Denis come through the garden-gate, and knew then whom I was awaiting, and I stood where I was until Denis came up, so deep in thought that he started visibly, and almost painfully, when I addressed him.

'I waited here to speak to you, Denis,' I began, as awkwardly shy as usual.

'Yes, Barry?' he said, in his gentle way, and offering me his hand, as if that were a tangible encouragement.

'Of Mary,' I went on.

'Yes,' he said, but not in the same absent tone.

'You are her friend, I know, Denis,' I said, making only a step at a time.

'Her lover, Barbara.'

'Yes, her lover,' I amended with the swift, passionate rising of a lump in my throat. 'I understand, Denis. It is *because* I understand that I have decided to consult you. I cannot help her in her trouble, and—perhaps you can.'

'No, I cannot,' he said, heavily. 'You heard her say so.'

'But you will listen to me, Denis; and you will try?'

'Try ! Oh, yes, I will try,' he said, with an odd, curt laugh. 'Surely I can be as faithful as she called *her Barbara*.'

'Hush, Denis, please ;' for the mood was so unlike the steadfast, patient friend of such long years. 'I will soon have finished. Walk here slowly, and so, if Mary comes, we shall not be unprepared.'

Then, walking just as Mr. Gunn and I had walked, and yet, for some inscrutable whim of mine, upon the other side of the bridge, I told him of that shock to Mary when the young convict crossed the quarry towards us in Portland ; of her frequent journeys to the island afterwards ; of her quest in London, and the hope of a discovery which had brought her here. Then, rather hesitatingly—for I feared what he might say to any independent act of mine, I had so seldom committed them—I told him of my fancy of the photograph helping us in our clue for a possible third person who might have been in the Belvidere, that day three years ago, and how I had gone back to buy the photograph, and found that one of the visitors to Rocklands on that day was Mary herself—offering him the photograph to take with him, and look at afterwards. Indeed, I quite fancied he might have seen it, for I felt sure the detective would have hunted it up, though to him the passengers would be equally unobtrusive, even if traceable.

'Hold it, Barbara,' he said, in a stern sort of way, and he lighted a wax match, and held it to the paper, for in the still night air the little flame burnt steadily. Then he was so silent that I did not like to speak, but I eagerly watched his face, as far as I could see it with the frail light touching it.

'Yes, it is Mary Keveene,' he said, and for a moment I saw a passion of angry love and desperate tenderness on his pale face, 'unmistakably so, though the Mary Keveene of three years ago more, of course, than of to-day. Barbara—no, do not take it ; leave it with me—I will tell you now where and how and when I met her first. I told you that what had so long puzzled me I understood when once more I saw her troubled and confused. You heard me tell her this evening how I had passed the Belvidere on the day of that murder three years ago ? Barbara—it was then I saw her.'

'Oh, Denis, hush, hush !' I cried, and clasped my hands upon my ears, though of course he knew the photograph might have prepared me for this ; 'I cannot bear it.'

'Yes you can, Barry,' he said, as kindly and gently as if he knew no suffering himself. 'It is only something which we in time shall comprehend, and to speak of it is best. I remember it all well now. It came back to me on that morning in Henry's room, when I saw the same pale lovely face, the same scared glance from the sorrowful dark eyes, and the same half-shrinking attitude of the tall young figure. I was driving from my father's

place in Westercombe on that June evening, and, as an old friend was with me in the dog-cart and was talking much, I drove slowly. I had gone a little way—perhaps a mile—beyond the Belvidere, when, on my right, among the undergrowth on the river's bank, I heard a quick, light, hurrying step, and was sure I also heard a low and pitiful sobbing. But my friend talked on, evidently hearing nothing, and so I did not stop; but—listening all the time—drove more slowly still. And then—and then,' said Denis, uncovering his head, and pushing the hair from his face, 'a woman came out into the road, as if straight to stop us: a woman young and tall and beautiful—but you know her; what need have I to say it? She seemed to be looking straight at me as she came in sight; her face terribly pale, but her eyes so dry and wide that it was a shock to me to see them so, after the grievous sobbing I had heard. She drew back when she saw us, and stood turning her head away, as if to prove she had no thought of us. I raised my hat involuntarily, for I could not help fancying she had hurried out into the road when she had heard our horses, and then she spoke to me, just quietly and calmly as a lady would, while still that fire was in her wide, dry eyes. She had mistaken, she said, the sound of our wheels, for those of the coach to Westercombe. No need to say I begged her to let us drive her if she had missed her coach, but my friend assured her she had not; and so, with a little bow, she walked from us, and we drove on. Just at first this lovely sorrowful face haunted me, but my friend laughed about 'the pretty damsel who had lost her party,' until I thought that was all, and it soon passed quite out of my mind. You know how a dim memory haunted me now and then in Miss Keveene's society, when I met her in Weymouth: it was the faint, almost dead memory of her face as I had seen it here; but the distinct remembrance returned to me on the day I saw her in Henry's room, with the same tearless misery in the beautiful eyes, and the same shrinking attitude. We were talking then of the murder which must on that other evening just have been committed, and thus the two days were brought together by a flash in my thoughts.'

'Then, Denis,' I gasped, 'you—really believe——'

'I believe,' he said, just like the loyal gentleman he was, 'nothing against the girl I love. But it has taught me whom she loves, and now I understand how she—loving him—can believe in no crime of his.'

'But this possible third person who might have been present in the Belvidere, Denis? Can you understand her wish to find that out when she——'

'Hush, dear,' said Denis, very low and patiently, but just as if he reminded me that no one had a right to doubt her. 'She will not take my help, and I love her too well to force it upon her; but she knows how wholly and entirely my heart is

hers, and perhaps some day, when she remembers this, she will let me be of use to her. But even now she will take your help, and gratefully. Be true to her, dear Barbara, and help her all you can.'

And I said I would, just looking up among the quiet stars, as if that would help me to be as true and unsuspicious as he was.

Wednesday, August 3rd, 1881.

For three days I have not written in my diary. I have been, like Mary, too restless and unsettled, but I fear it was also because I have been suspicious and uncomfortable, even in spite of trying to imitate Denis. Mary has avoided the Belvidere for these three days, spending them in the constant pursuit of a phantom hope we never reach. She goes into the cottages for miles around, and will sit and listen by the hour to anyone who will talk to her on the chance of hearing what might be a clue to the discovery on which her heart is set. On the plea of buying milk, she will take me into the farm kitchens and talk, if not to the master or mistress, to the servants she may see. She will sit on the river bank beside a man who is fishing, or stand in the fields and talk to the labourers. Anywhere, with anyone, she will seek for a chance word which may throw a ray of light, however feeble, upon that dark hour's deed that some one did three years ago. But the light never yet has fallen upon it.

And all this time I keep with her, and try to be true to her, haunted by the vision Denis left me of this girl hurrying from the Belvidere—surely bearing in her heart some clue to the terrible secret for which she seeks so indefatigably now—and puzzled beyond all words by the consciousness of what she herself must know of that cruel day.

With Mr. Gunn Mary has tried to discuss the mystery of that murder, but in vain, for he asked her so frankly where the mystery lay that she was silent. He did not believe, he said, that it was a premeditated murder, but any mystery he failed to see. How often my heart aches to see her try to speak of this deed as if to her it were a mere matter of casual interest, while I feel that untiringly, unrestingly, undespairingly, she will follow up her search, even if it be life-long.

Sometimes she is, in her moods to me, feverishly impatient, sometimes unutterably weary; but often she shakes off memory, as it were, for my sake, and that mood I like least of all.

Though Denis stayed all through last Monday at the Rocklands Hotel, he did not come to us again. He had bidden Mary farewell, as I felt sure, and would not intrude upon her after that. Never since he left her on Sunday night had we mentioned his name until this evening, when I could no longer bear

her unnatural reticence about him, and so talked of him as if I knew of no reason at all why his name should not be uttered between us just as easily as of old—though indeed it never was quite easily uttered between us two, at first because of my mean nature, though I did strive against that inexcusable jealousy, and afterwards because of the sorrow of his love for her, and her sad consciousness of this sorrow. She did not stop me, though I saw a patient shadow in her eyes while her thoughts were thus made to hold him. And though I hated to give her pain, and felt how vain my efforts were to turn her heart to him, yet I considered it well to talk of him. I think that, if we had once let his name become buried in an unexplained silence, the feeling would have grown incurable. That was why I talked of him as we came home this evening, and though it was but very shallow talk—even Mary herself could not have felt that more keenly than I did—and barely what my heart dictated; and, though my listener never once broke her silence, I think I succeeded, in a certain way, in preventing any cloud settling down upon his memory between us, and so it answered its purpose, and perhaps another day it will be easier to me. I will hope so, for, indeed, it was rather hard to-day all through that wearisome walk across the heath. After that, and the enforced cheerfulness of our late tea, it was as much to escape from the sound of my own exerted voice, as from the sight of Mary's restlessness, that I went into the garden alone, and sat down on an unyielding little green bench hidden among the lilac bushes above the river. There I tried to think out my thoughts with clearness, but it proved impossible. I have read of others doing this, but I never succeeded myself, and could not to-day, try as I would. Indeed, the more I tried to make them fixed and intent, the more they wandered after stray clouds on the blue fields of heaven; the more I tried to follow a certain thread, the more they stayed idiotically with a snail upon the path before me; the more I tried to concentrate them upon the solving of the problem worrying me, the more they fluttered with the shivering leaves or fell to the bubbles on the water at my feet. So when at last I heard a step behind me, I am afraid I was relieved to feel my interest awakened even in a passer-by, for I knew I could not myself be seen among the lilacs, not calculating on Mr. Gunn's acquaintance with this very retired and rigorous little seat; and his pursuing his way to it quite ignorant of any one's presence there. I was so tired of myself, of my own voice, and of my unruly and disordered thoughts, that I immediately felt glad that I should have a new channel for them now for a little, and hear tones that were not forced into cheerfulness, as mine had been all the evening. I think one may say there are two sorts of men, those who make us talk, and those who make us listen; Mr. Gunn is certainly one of the



last, and just then it suited me to be made to listen. He sat down, in a sort of satisfied way, just as if he had come prepared to find his audience there awaiting him, and told me of his day's tasks. He told me how he had been to a little isolated farm on the edge of the moor, having heard that a poor woman living there had lost her husband a few days before ; and how, instead of her being wrapped in grief, he had found her surrounded by guests of a sociable, not to say convivial turn ; how she had taken him to see her husband in his coffin, wearing his ordinary Sunday dress, great coat and hat, and carrying his walking stick ; and how one of the guests, who had followed, asked him gravely, 'Where do ee think he's for then, pa'son ?'

Then he told me how Miss Brock had been narrating to him this man's conversion in the time when revivals were the order of the day here, and those revived were moved, as Angerona said, to become at once Joined Methodists. He was the only one converted that night, she said, for the meeting was so very dead they did call on Brother Josiah Trewawa, who was up from the West, to engage in prayer, and Brother Josiah was so greatly exercised in spirit he only got up and looked at his watch, saying very solemnly and sadly—

'I do only wish to remind the Almighty that 'tis a quarter to nine o'clock, and that if we're to have a revival here to-night 'tis time to see about it.'

I do not think I laughed at this reminiscence of Miss Brock's, but I was grateful for having my thoughts turned from their cruel, bad suspicion, and I listened in lazy gratitude. Presently Mr. Gumm's voice grew different. It lost its breezy merriment, and was stirred wholly by that under-current of earnestness which in reality never seems absent from it, and he talked to me of his past life until—well, until, in some curious way, it seemed to me that I must have known him in that past life he spoke of. One thing he told me I recall with a ridiculous and nameless pleasure to-night. It was of his entering on his first living. He was very young, but looked far younger even than he was, and the men of his new parish—turbulent, opinionated mill-hands—rebelled against the idea of accepting from their bishop such a boyish teacher, determining they would go to his first service and show him unmistakably afterwards what such a lad was to expect from them. He heard of this, but was not dismayed. On the Sunday morning the church was crowded with rough fellows, ready to have no mercy in their thoughts upon the young preacher who dared attempt such a task as guiding them. But, strong in the knowledge how little he himself was the real teacher, he rose, and, looking down upon the hard and discontented faces, read his text—'There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes.'

He was the lad, and had carried the loaves and fishes—only that. It was not he who could bless what he brought, and make it satisfy the multitude. It was not he who was to give it them from his hands. He was only there in the crowd with the bread waiting, for the Master, knowing they were faint, would bless it and feed them. This he told me very simply, yet I am sure I know how he could say it more than simply, and though he told me nothing of the hard faces relaxing, as I could fancy, he did tell me that never after that was his boyish face a subject of complaint. ‘Nor,’ he said, ‘did I leave that parish without sincere regret.’ I think I read, in the seriousness of those few words, that he had won hearts there, and that it was good to him to remember them; but I grew stupidly silent after this story, and he will never again think it worth while to tell me any incident of his past. Fortunately Mary came up to us presently, and then between those two there was a little bright and sensible talk, she redeeming our women’s character in his eyes after my stupidity. We were all surprised at last when we found how late it was, and Mr. Gunn apologised for detaining us, laughing as we separated, and quoting something that sounded like ‘And so, as old Pepys said, to bed;’ but I don’t at all know whether that was it.

Friday, August 5th.

Surely I know now that in the coming of that dreadful storm lay a reason for the depression there has been upon us these last two days. I saw Mary struggle against it in her brave, reticent way, but I gave in at once, in an infirm manner peculiarly my own. All yesterday I stayed indoors, with such a heavy headache that positively to move was pain, and it gave me an unhealthy fancy that Mary was falling ill. I seemed to see it in her face all the while she sympathised so tenderly with me, and in every movement while she waited on me, in that easy, quiet way of hers which is so pretty. The fancy grew, until I could have shrieked aloud in my fear; and at last, powerless to keep back my tears, I begged her to go out for a little. Seeing me really in earnest, she consented and went, smiling in upon me through the open window as she passed, with a frank, bright, unsuspecting smile which made me loathe myself, and coming back far fairer and prettier herself than the sweet hedge-roses that she brought me. And yet—and yet my doubting eyes unkindly shunned the lovely face, for they always seemed to see there now the unuttered sorrow Denis saw three years ago. I was glad to go early to my room, following Mary’s advice, though I knew I could not win the rest she prescribed for me, while this merciless suspicion warred with my love for her, and while the love will not grow less,

My headache was not gone this morning, but I rose and tried to forget it. I see now how natural it was while that great storm was gathering in the air. We went out together, and had one of our slow, far wanderings, staying for quite an hour with an old man who was mending a gate on the roadside, while Mary sought, by gradual, gentle questioning, to find out whether he had any suspicion about that murder in the Belvidere. When, in answer to one of her remarks, he said, in his sententious Devon way, 'Found out all? Not they, 'less they can tell ee the woman that's in it,' I thought the burning red of my face would have killed our friendship for ever; but Mary never saw it. She was looking far away, gravely pondering, and, when we started on again, she only said,

'Barry, if you don't mind, we will go back past the Belvidere.'

I did mind, but still I had been, in a way, expecting this for days, and so made up my mind to it, glad at the same time that we had not the key, and so could not enter, even if Mary should take that desire.

'Perhaps there may be a little breeze up on the height,' I said, as a feeble source of consolation, when we turned from the hot road. 'Did you ever know the air so still and oppressive before?'

'No,' said Mary. 'It is little wonder that your head aches, Barry. The atmosphere presses upon us like a tangible burden.'

But as we ascended we saw the whole face of the sky change and darken. It had been one wide expanse of burning blue but now from the south rose dense folds of cloud, and wrapped the entire firmament. I would not have believed such a rapid change possible. Presently out from the inky clouds flashed a wild dart of fire, and from the hills far off a deafening peal rolled past us, seeming to rend the ground on which we stood. Then the rain poured straight and suddenly down upon us, while we ran up to the tower that we might stand against its wall and so be sheltered, partially, at any rate. It was indeed only a very partial shelter, but we stood close against the locked door, and close to each other; I frightened a little, but ashamed of my fear, while Mary stood with wide, sad eyes watching the storm. At first she spoke to me now and then, but was silent presently, only breathing quickly when the blue lightning stroke came flying more vividly over the woods, and swallowed us in a more fierce and awful light; or the thunder-claps seemed more mightily to shake the tower against which we stood. We could not see the river, as the tower was between us and it, but we heard its angry water beaten by the great hail-stones which now so ruthlessly dashed against us, and swept down the heath and bracken on the bank.

It seemed to me that we had stood cowering there for hours, when I saw, scarcely believing that I saw aright, Denis Vesey come running up the slope, carrying something under his loose,

long mackintosh. I felt the start Mary gave when I pointed him out to her, but I do not think I wondered over it.

'Come quickly, please,' he called to us; not joining us, but pausing a dozen yards away, and unfolding the cloaks he had brought for us, so obliging us to leave our questionable security and join him.

'Had you not brought the key? I am very glad; now we will go quickly back,' he said to Mary, as he put her long blue waterproof about her.

'Wrap up, Barbara,' Mary said, but he only smiled at me, and, taking her hat from her, put on the blue hood with its deep collar, making her independent of the rain—he had evidently sought instruction from Silla, and did her credit. Then he wished to help me, but I had already buttoned on my cloak and turned the cape up over my head, so we were ready. Just as we turned to go there was one appalling flash, a shock as if the ground were opening beneath our feet, a rumble and crash, utterly indescribable; and when I uncovered my frightened eyes I knew the lightning had struck the Belvidere, broken every pane of glass, and, forcing its way out under the locked door, had shattered into fragments the stone step on which we had so long been standing. In the moment of panic Mary had turned to Denis, taking his wet hand tightly between both her own; and in her gratitude, when she saw the death we had escaped, she held it still; standing motionless, looking up from the shattered building to the dark sky. I think now that she did not know she had held him, either in the shock or in the relief, but I thought then how strange it was, and how impossible that, by any words of hers, she could ever undo that one free and spontaneous betrayal of utter trust in him.

It never struck me, until Denis had entered the Ladyhouse with us, and I looked at him as he stood without his hat, that he had come back to us for some most earnest purpose. I saw it in his tender, sympathetic manner, and in his grave and anxious scrutiny of Mary.

'I will only disturb you a few minutes, Miss Keveene,' he said. He had gone up to the window where Mary stood looking out upon the rain-plashed flowers and murky sky, 'I came back—I reverently thank my God that I came just when I did—because I have something to tell you. I had only gone to Westercombe, and was staying there, when I read in the London papers something which brought me on to you.'

Not by a word did Mary question him when he paused; but to me—sitting back in the shadow watching her—her eyes, lifted with such sudden trouble to his, questioned him without the utterance of a word.

'Yes,' he said, answering the glance, 'it is about your lover.' Denis spoke in what seemed an abrupt and cruel way, but perhaps

his own distress made it sound so to me, who know so little of men's suffering.

'Of whom?' she whispered, growing white to the very lips, in her startled surprise, of course, at this so suddenly betrayed knowledge of his.

'Of your lover,' he repeated, but far less steadily. 'You did not tell me—why should you trust me so far!—but I saw. Forgive me for having startled you; but, indeed, I thought it best. Perhaps I only thought it best for myself, for I am a—selfish fool. Forgive me.'

'Will you tell me,' said Mary, gently, 'what you came to tell, and of whom you speak?'

'Of Evelyn Discombe,' Denis said, his strong fingers grasping the back of a chair near him, as if the mental tension could be eased so. 'From his convict cell he has sent a confession that the slaughter of George Haslam was planned deliberately, carried out warily, well considered, and of set purpose. A premeditated, wilful murder, and he gives himself up as the murderer.'

'He cannot,' cried Mary, as if from a breaking heart—and yet I never went to her, to take her restless hands in mine, or kiss and give her comfort.

'Will you tell me,' asked Denis, in a tone I had never heard from him before, a tone I could not understand, though somehow it made me feel as if his heart were breaking too, 'why do you think he could not have done this thing?'

'I know,' she said, her fingers tightly locked, 'that he who— who could win such love as—he has, could not be—a murderer.'

'I think you are right,' said Denis, with an awful stiffness on his face, as he strove to hide all feeling save his kind compassion for her, 'I think you are right, though I do not understand how it can be. I think he is not guilty, or—a woman could not love him so.'

'You believe that?' she asked, looking up at him with a momentary radiance in the sorrowful dark eyes.

'Yes, I can believe that,' he said; and I know I was a hundred miles from guessing what this kind effort cost him. 'If you love him, I can believe in him. If you feel his innocence, I can—believe it.'

'It is death he seeks. He confesses falsely that he may—die, and his misery be over,' said Mary. 'He could not endure that prolonged punishment. You said—you told us once—Barbara and me—when we—when you showed us some convicts and spoke of them, that the protracted suffering—and humiliation—were unendurable to—to men of refinement. This herding—you called it—with hardened villains. And I said they all deserved it. *All!* How I have prayed to be forgiven my ignorant and presumptuous judgment! Oh! his innocence shall be proved. It only wants the proof.'

'So hard to win,' put in Denis, gently.

'But you believe him innocent?' she cried, looking piteously up into his face. 'He could no more have committed that—deliberate murder than—I could.'

'Hush! hush!' cried Denis, his voice shaken by actual pain, while I stepped back, almost as if her gentle hand had struck me.

'But you believe me now? And so does Barbara'—with a wan smile for me.

'Yes,' he said, and the word was like a reviving touch for me.

'And you, Barbara?'

'Yes, I believe what Mary does,' I answered, stupidly.

'That is well,' Denis said, almost in his old manly, cheery way. 'I have more faith in a woman's instinct than in any amount of the reasoning which you leave to us men. That was a shrewd observant fellow who said,

"Reasoning at every step he treads,  
Man oft mistakes his way,"

wasn't he? Miss Keveene'—with a change of tone—'you will let me work with you now?'

'No,' said Mary, with that strange flush which seemed only to brighten her eyes and deepen the red of her lips, 'I need no help. I may see him now. I can see him now with no iron barrier and no jailer between us. Why do you start, Mr. Vesey? I understand better now. I have learnt much since that morning when you told us of the convicts. And you told me—other things that morning. I remember'—offering him her hand in farewell, with a feverish brilliance in her mournful eyes—'but I will forget it—for your sake. You will be so sorry now that you ever—said—you cared for me.'

'Sorry!' he echoed, with a moment's rapturous longing on his face; then he laid his hand on his unsteady lips, and stilled the passionate words he had been going to say.

A few minutes afterwards he had left us, and Mary turned to me.

'Barbara,' she said, with an hysterical little laugh, 'I read last night of an execution in Stafford. I gave the paper to Silla for Miss Brock. Will you ask her for it?'

'Nonsense,' I said, sturdily, though my heart beat with a babyish fear as I looked into Mary's haggard eyes. 'What do we want with newspapers two or three days old? It is stupid enough wasting our time reading them once over, and when they are fresh—as fresh, at least, as we can have them here. For pity's sake don't make us read them twice. Let Miss Brock light her fires with them, and let me go and see whether she has forgotten our tea.' For I felt I must escape for a few moments, or I should be of no use to her ever again. And so I went and

hastened tea, and saw that paper burnt ; and then, by strenuous exertions, we passed through the evening hours almost as on other days.

Saturday, August 6th.

Hour after hour last night I lay awake, listening to Mary's step as she walked restlessly to and fro in her room, which is next to mine. When the step ceased it was broad summer daylight, and so I felt very doubtful of her having gone to rest. I suppose I must have fallen asleep after that, but it was not a usual sleep, and I awoke unrefreshed, with a vague anxiety upon me. I rose at once, for anything was easier than to lie still, under this intangible oppression. It was so early when I went downstairs that I did not like to disturb Miss Brock or her maid, and so went straight into the garden, and to that prim little seat hidden among the lilacs, thirstily drinking the fresh, strong morning air. I recalled all Mr. Gunn had told me there the day before yesterday, but even then I could not succeed in banishing other thoughts, and, as soon as ever I fancied Mary might be downstairs, I returned to the house. No one was in our room save Miss Brock, laying the breakfast, and I was glad even to hear her voice, while I hesitated about going upstairs to disturb Mary or question Silla. She told me how seriously the storm of yesterday had damaged the standing crops ; then enlarged feelingly on her own alarm when 'the whisht crack o' thunder shook her ;' immediately afterwards calling my attention to a little glass dish of honey which she had just brought in. She wished all her lodgers to have their 'dowry,' she said, of her own honey, and that was ours, if we pleased. She was sure Miss Keveene would relish it after her walk.

I hope I thanked her, but I only recollect inquiring if Miss Keveene were really out.

'Lor,' yes, miss,' Angerona said. 'She did go an hour ago, straight to the Belvidere, for I myself gave her the key. 'Tis a pity she's not in now, but I won't spoil the rashers by being puncshal.'

Taking my hat, I started off to follow Mary, but I met one little hindrance. At the open door of Mr. Gunn's parlour his eldest son stood looking out with a watchful anxiety.

'Nap's ett John's honey,' he observed to me, without introduction or further comment.

'Oh, but I daresay,' replied I, at hazard, swayed both by haste and incapacity, 'the honey was meant for you little ones.'

'No,' he asserted, with pious conscientiousness, 'we'd ett ours, and this was John's, and John's out, and Nap's ett it.'

'Oh ! Nap,' said I, most unwillingly drawn in to reprove so glaring a misdemeanour, 'how could you ?'

'I smelled it,' explained Nap, with touching brevity, lifting a serene glance to me from his big black eyes.

'But it's gone,' urged Trot, with sweet persistence, 'and Nap goned it.'

In terror lest I should have to examine into this state of affairs—for I felt an excruciating certainty that the honey in question had not been visible since Nap smelled it—and shrinking from the indignity of remaining inactive in presence of Trot's saintly sense of justice, I ignominiously and hastily beat a retreat.

The morning was such a contrast to yesterday. A fresh, strong wind shook the reluctant trees, and hurried the clouds along to where, on the far horizon, the sky was one broad sweep of gloom; while now and then across its dusky folds there sailed a frightened, wandering bird. I had not expected to overtake Mary, but to my surprise when I came up the height, just within sight of the door of the Belvidere, I saw her walking slowly up and down before it. And it was during those few minutes before I reached her that I quite decided in my mind to tell her all I knew. There should be—I told myself resolutely—no longer this vague mist of suspicion and mystery between us. I would tell her not only of the photograph, but also of Denis's remembrance of meeting her, three years ago, below this very tower on the evening the murder was committed. I would tell all, and if she must hate me for what I said, even that would be better than this hatred of myself which was growing upon me in my secrecy. I think now that what so suddenly moved me to this determination was the consciousness—brought forcibly before me, as I saw the utter hopelessness of Mary's restless movements and troubled aspect—of some great mystery puzzling and paining her too; but I did not stop then to wonder what had urged me to the decision. I only made it, firm beyond all unmaking in that moment. All through my walk I had intended first to ask her, as casually as I might, why she had come out so early, and without me—or something which should sound unconcerned and natural, and take all seriousness from the fact of my having followed her—but when I found her, that intention went out of my head. I only knew that I must now lift—by my own painful words—this cloud of suspicion and secrecy between us.

But she did not wait for me to speak. She seized my hand in a tight, feverish clasp, standing half turned from me, and looking down among the trees.

'It is coming back to me, Barbara,' she said. 'It was a dream that brought it back, and helped me last night. Oh! I saw—the dead.'

'Mary dear,' I whispered, touching her lips with mine, though she was turned away—for that brave little gasp in her quiet voice was terrible to me—'I have a story to tell you, and it may rest you to hear it. Let us walk home that I may tell you there.'



'No! no!' she said, I must go in here. I can bear it now you are come. Yours is an innocent, happy story, and can wait. Oh! my dear, that I should feel so stricken in your sight!'

'I am almost inclined,' I said, looking away from the great, melancholy, passionate eyes, and slipping her arm through mine while I took the key from her, 'to take you home to breakfast first. But perhaps as we are here we may as well go in and have a few minutes' talk. One thing though, Mary, please to remember for my sake. You know I have told you how I disbelieve and despise and abhor dreams, so I shall be hard upon them. Don't forget, dear.'

'It was no dream, I think,' said Mary, pushing her hair from her forehead with the hand I did not hold. 'I do not think I slept at all.'

'Oh, yes, you did. Even during our worst nights we sleep a little now and then, though we may not be aware of it,' I said, in my matter-of-fact way, as we mounted the few shallow steps. 'Mary, are you so tired, dear? I never before heard you pant in mounting any height, or any number of steps. I hate this place. I shall not tell you what I meant to tell you until we are back in our own snug room, and have had a good breakfast, with our 'dowry' of Angerona's honey.'

No one knows how long I might have gone on in this feebly would-be-cheerful strain, but that Mary herself stopped me, drawing her hand from my arm, and closing the book-lined door of the little room upon us.

'Barbara,' she said, standing back, and gazing vaguely at the shelves, 'look on the upper one. Are the books there volumes of "State Trials"?''

'Yes,' said I; and I do not think I failed utterly in speaking in my usual voice.

'There is a fourth volume?' she said, presently, leaning against the little shattered window opposite the shelves, and speaking in a strange, clear whisper.

'Yes.'

'Will you—open it?'

'Certainly,' I said; 'but won't it be rather dry reading before breakfast? You must not forget, Mary dear, that I am not at all a reading person, and I really feel the want of breakfast;' but this time my little ruse was unavailing.

'Will you,' said Mary, with evidently no appreciation of my difficulty over that speech, 'open it—at—page ninety-two?'

'Hadn't I better pass it over to you?' I asked, as I sought the right volume, while yet my heart was beating as I never felt it beat before.

'Page ninety-two,' repeated Mary, facing me, with a sort of desolate look in her eyes. 'Will you find it, Barbara? I cannot.'

'I have found it,' said I, presently, trembling in the most unaccountable manner. 'There is a sheet of paper here—so thin that the book does not open at the page—and it is covered with close writing.'

'Yes,' said Mary, and the hand she held out to me trembled worse than mine. But just as I was going to lay the paper in it she started back, locking her fingers together, and lifting them so for a moment to her pale lips. 'No! No, I cannot,' she breathed, passionately, yet in a very whisper. 'I cannot. I dare—not read it. Barbara, hold it. But—do not read to me, until I have—told you—the sorrow of my life.'

Meeting that desolate look in her eyes, I tried to prevent her telling me anything, but she lifted one hand pleadingly: 'You cannot understand,' she said. 'No one could whose heart has not been bound up all through life in one other heart. No one! It is—terrible. At least, since then I've felt it to be terrible—and pitiful. You have heard me pity those who are devoted to each other. But *then*—Ah! well, it was happiness *then*, and had been happiness for twenty years. For we were the same age, Barbara; born on the same day, and—I think we had seemed to have the same thoughts and feelings as we had the same face—why do you start? Am I more cold and ungrateful to you even than you thought, never before to have told you I had a twin sister? Oh! Barbara, you would forgive me if you knew how speaking of it—this moment—brings back all the old suffering. I *am* cold and ungrateful and mistrustful—no one knows it more sadly than myself!—but in those days, when I had my darling, loving me, hoping with me, working with me, I believe I did not understand what suspicion meant. We thought the world such a warm, loving, happy place! We thought all men were good, and just, and generous; and that all women's lives were glad, and bright, and busy. Dear heaven, how different it was for us! Don't look so sorry for me, dear. I will try to tell you quickly. The uncle we lived with was quite poor; but what was poverty to us when he was good and patient with us, when all our hours were filled with study that we loved, or leisure that we prized and made precious to each other? He died just as we were growing into womanhood, and all he had died with him; but he had always warned us it would be so, and we were not dismayed. Then an old friend of his offered to either of us the post of village schoolmistress in his parish—in that lovely Irish valley I have spoken of. We gladly accepted it between us, and determined to help each other to do what besides we could, and never to separate.

'We had a relative—my mother's half-sister—who had married a very rich man, and lived in Cork. She came to us at this time and—tried to separate us, because Helen was beautiful, and she would have taken her to be an adopted daughter

‘Barbara, I hid all my fear. I pretended I shouldn’t be lonely ; and I seemed as if I hadn’t a single doubt about my darling accepting this offer, which our aunt said would be so greatly to her advantage ; yet, while I thought it possible, all the future looked black as ink to me. But she laughed—O, Barbara, her laughter was the music of my life !—and would not leave me. Then—then I knew what it was to be so utterly content as to want no other thing on earth, and from that hour our happiness seemed to grow—perfect, as we had always thought it, while we had each other—until——

‘It was a very busy life we led, for we had teaching besides our school, and Helen played the organ in the church, and taught the choir ; but we had holiday leisure now and then ; and, Barbara, I can never tell you what our holidays were to us.

‘It was in the autumn, nearly four years ago, when one day a gentleman looked into the church while Helen was practising, I standing waiting for her, for always, when I could not go with her, she would wait for me to join her there, that we might have the walk home together. He spoke to us about the church and the neighbourhood, saying he was only passing through the valley on a walking tour to Killarney ; but next day he had taken rooms at the village inn, and not only Helen and I, but all the village, soon might have been aware why he stayed. Oh, Barbara, now he loved her ! It was a fresh, open, boyish love, yet somehow its earnestness was almost painful. His love not only seemed all he had in the world to think of, or build upon, but all he wished to have. Do you understand ? To me Helen had always been most beautiful, but now I saw that to all others she was growing lovely exceedingly in this new joy and sweetness of life. In the great gladness which her love made for her she held me always ; Evlyn’s love for her never separated us ; her love for him never shut me from her. It was only by stratagem or entreaty I could be ever solitary, even after they were engaged, and I soon loved him, Barbara—as a brother. A true, gentle, generous man ; noble, honourable, disinterested—that was what we knew him, in those happy times when Helen sang about our cottage as if her heart would burst with joy if it kept silence ; and when my heart was light as air in its supreme content ; and the hours—the busy and the idle ones—fled by as minutes.

‘It was quite winter when Evlyn Ashton—*Eva*, Helen always called him in her merry way—went away at last, to return in spring, but every day his letters came, and before the spring had fairly reached us he was back. But her trust in him had been so perfect that his presence scarce could make her happier—at least it would seem not to anyone who loved her less entirely than I. One day—I remember it was a dreamy, still May afternoon—Evlyn came to the cottage to bid us good-bye, for a little

time, he said. He was summoned to England on business which he could not postpone, nor could he explain it—so he frankly told us—until his return, which would not be one hour unnecessarily delayed. Nor should he write, he said; praying Helen to trust him in his silence.

‘Trust him! Indeed, indeed she did. I bade him good-bye and left them, trembling a little after I had heard him go, for fear of meeting a sad look on Helen’s face. But she ran to seek me, and kissed me, and led me out, as if it were I who needed comfort, not she, who knew so well his love was hers! Barbara, what can I tell you—next? He had been gone some weeks when my aunt wrote again to Helen. She had done so many times, reiterating the old inducement that Helen should live as a lady if she would go to her; and as I had seen all those letters, and had a few moments’ pang over the allurements offered my darling, before her merry rejection of them, I was glad that now at last she forbore to show me one. But this new trait of Helen’s was followed by a great shock to me.

‘I taught alone that morning, and when I entered the cottage after school hours—feeling still upon my lips the long kiss she had given me when we separated after breakfast, and wondering that I heard no glad voice singing, no light step moving in the cottage rooms—my heart sank even before thought had had time to frame itself. Barbara, instead of her dear welcome, there were a few hurried lines written to me, and blurred with tears. She was going to her aunt’s house, Helen wrote, for a little visit, and dared not trust herself to say farewell to me, for fear she should break down and be unfit to go. So she had given me a farewell kiss that morning, she said, and there was a loving little prayer for God to bless me till she came back to me, in only a few days’ time.

‘In only a few days’ time! This was my comfort, for—can you believe it, Barbara?—that was our first separation. I knew Helen had written the truth, and that in a few days’ time she would come back to me; so I prepared for her, and thought of her, and only one week had passed when she came. Oh! Barbara, I have often and often felt that, though I have lived so long since then—a lifetime, as it were—that was the day of my real death. If someone had covered my eyes suddenly while my darling laughed and jested with me, and then uncovered them upon her dead face in its coffin, it could not have been a greater shock. I knew, in one swift flash of anguish, that all her youth and hope and happiness were dead. You cannot feel this, Barbara. It would be impossible for anyone to picture such a change. For one hour, in darkness, in the dead of night, I wrestled with this awful agony, alone—with God. After that, I never left her—till the end. It came so soon! Oh, Barbara, think of it—think of it, and you must pity me. She was all I had on earth, I

loved her with my whole heart ; and my heart was like one with hers, so that I suffered all her suffering, Barbara, and my own too. Do you wonder I can never bear to love again? I knew he had killed her. Do you wonder that I hated—all men for his sake? Never once after her return to me was his name mentioned between us ; I could not be the first to utter it in the face of that terrible shadow which I knew only he could have brought upon us. Every thought now of our past was like a stab in my heart. Every memory of my darling in her beauty and her joy was like seeing her—murdered ; not by one swift stab, mercifully fatal, but by—torture. I knew without one word from her that he had done all this ; so do you wonder that I scorn man's so-called love, for he *seemed* true and faithful. From that time I shrank in very dread from loving anyone again, and I knew that, though I might live perhaps through long, long years to come, he had killed me as surely as he had killed my darling.

'You said once that you could not be sorry for the young and pretty. Did youth or prettiness save her from those terrible hours of restlessness, of sleeplessness, of suffering? While I watched her, powerless to help her or relieve her, heart-broken because my love, in all its great intensity, could not spare her one pang, could not give her one hour's—even one minute's—sleep or rest. Oh ! those long, long, weary nights, through which the wide wakeful eyes never closed, the wan, fevered lips—the lips that always, always used to smile—moved only in a pitiful delirium.'

'Mary,' I cried, for my thoughts had held a conjecture which was strangely a relief to me, 'was your twin sister so like you that you could be mistaken?'

'Yes,' said Mary, pushing the hair from her white face ; 'we were sometimes mistaken for each other. We used to put our faces together before the glass, and laugh to see the features all the same ; yet my darling was far, far too pretty to be really mistaken for me.'

'I see,' I said, but could not smile even at this idea, while I looked into the lovely face that told me more than the broken sentences. 'Now, my dear, do not tell me more.'

'Yes, please ; I have a little more to tell. Oh ! Barry, help me !'

'How had it happened so quickly, so suddenly?' I asked, uttering almost involuntarily the question that had been puzzling me.

'I could not know. I knew she had been—killed, and had come home to me to die. No more. She told me nothing. She would lie, her eyes following me with a terrible, aching want in them, but she would never speak of any want at all. She would watch the door sometimes for hours, as if dreading the entrance of some one, but she never uttered a dread. Ah ! could

it be my own warm, tender, happy Nell? I used to cry. I have known no more ever since.'

'When was it that your sister went to Cork?' I asked, presently, with just a shy, stupid touch upon Mary's clasped hands.

'In June,' she said, slowly. 'That was three years ago last June.'

'And can you remember whether she was absent on the twenty-seventh?'

'Can I remember? No. I have tried and tried through these terrible days since that morning on Portland Island, when, for the first time since he bade us good-bye so hopefully in our Irish cottage, I saw—Evlyn Discombe: Evlyn Ashton, as he called himself to us. Didn't Miss Brock tell us he had taken his mother's name? But no; I can remember nothing of that time, save its misery, and I wrote no word that I could refer to. How could I write of that intolerable anguish? And she said so little to me, save when she was not conscious what she said. Oh! Barbara, Barbara, I knew nothing but that Helen suffered, and that I—— But——' (with her locked hands against her heaving breast)—'last night I—you will say it was a dream—I saw her, my own darling. Not as she has come to me in dreams before, her own sweet, happy, loving self, but as she came in that day, affrighted, as it seemed, and with listening eyes. Do you understand that, Barbara? Did you ever see eyes *listening*, listening always—and trembling so that I could not calm her, closely as I held her in my arms. And—she spoke again in the old broken, sad, delirious way, and said again what she had said through many restless, feverish hours. And then I seemed to understand the words, as I had failed to do before. It was of a misty, brooding day she spoke, and of the river's sound. She said it hurt her, and then she told me eagerly to look on the upper shelf. They were all "State Trials," she said, but I should reach her the fourth volume, and I should find in it page ninety-two. Barbara, you know what we have found there? You will—read it.'

'Presently, dear,' I answered, and then told my story of the photographs, and of Denis seeing Mary herself, as he had fancied—but knowing now whom he had really seen—and while I spoke I trembled like an idiot, and kissed again and again the white, haggard face. 'Yes, I will read it when we have left this chilly place. Now come.'

She came, obedient as a child, but walked beside me so blindly and uncertainly that I put a supporting arm around the tall young figure whose ease and carriage I had so often envied.

'Yes, I am glad to come,' she said; 'it seems horrible to me here—horrible. I feel now that my darling must have *seen* that—deed. If she did, how could she have lived even to reach me? Oh, what wonder that—she died!'

My tears were pouring so childishly from my eyes that I could

not answer, but I fought with them, and we reached the Lady-house without encountering anyone to notice our poor miserable faces.

Though I could not bear to leave Mary, I felt she ought to be alone to read that paper, and so, when we had reached her bedroom, I gave it into her hand, and left her alone with it, holding it tightly, but not looking down upon it. I would not go far away, so I sat in the porch below her open window ; but for long there was so marked a silence that I felt sure Mary was pausing, scarce feeling she had strength to read what her twin sister might have written. Then suddenly, from the open window, there came through the clear air a cry which I feel must haunt me evermore. I could not keep away from her an instant longer, and without one thought, save for her suffering, I went in to her. I folded her in my arms, and kissed her, and tried to comfort her with words that were insane, I am sure, however loving, and at the time I never thought how unlike me was such an act.

‘Go away, Barbara!’ Such a wailing cry it was! ‘I must bear this alone.’ And seeing how mournfully in earnest she was, I went.

For about an hour I bore the silence, then I felt I must go in to her again. She was sitting on the bed, her arms folded on the footrail, her face hidden on them. When she heard me at her side, she lifted her face—such a white face, with all the hair pushed feverishly from it, and such hopeless sorrow in the beautiful eyes!

‘Barbara,’ she whispered, ‘read this.’

I took the paper, sitting down, for fear she should see how I trembled, and read what was written there—even the handwriting was exactly like Mary’s. She watched my face, falling to her knees presently beside me, as if she could see better looking up.

‘Do you understand it?’ she said at last, with a gentle little touch upon my bent head, as if I were the one who should be comforted. ‘I do—cruelly. Shall I tell you what it means?’

‘Yes,’ I said, and laid the paper down, and looked straight into her sad eyes, wondering over this strange composure and this lowliness so unlike her. Somehow I felt that it would be better for her to speak to me, but as I had understood a little I need not torture her to tell me all.

‘I see that what I thought was true. Your sister only stayed in Cork just to hear—of Mr. Discombe, and—came here. That letter of your aunt’s seems to have contained some implication against him, which she—Helen—determined to prove false.’

‘Yes, it said that he was not the man he professed to be : that he lived at Rocklands as Mr. Discombe ; had taken possession of his estate ; was about to be married ; and had deceived her from beginning to end. She went to Cork to deny this, and then—hearing it confirmed—she went to disprove it. She was

but a girl, Barbara, and knew the world so little ! She went to Westerscombe, and wrote from there to Evlyn, begging him to see her, and while she waited she heard his story, as we have heard it—I mean of course up to that day. And if she had not,—you can see that she never believed a word against him. She only wished to—prove it, just as I have lately wished to prove his—innocence. He wrote back to her, and begged her to meet him—to meet him——’

‘Yes, yes,’ I said, soothingly. ‘To meet him in the Belvidere. I read that. He could not bear to leave his father for long enough to go to Westerscombe, and he could not bear that, while his father lay unconscious and dying, and Mr. Haslam ruled at the Manor, his future wife should visit his home for the first time—and thus. That was most natural. He would have her welcomed there with honour and rejoicing. So she was to go to the Belvidere, and he would await her there. But if she were first, he begged her to believe he would be detained only by his father, as there might be a change in him. Yes, I read that, and that she came to Rocklands by the coach, and went to the Belvidere, and he was awaiting her. She must have reached the tower by the way we did, else Miss Brock would have seen her, though perhaps not necessarily so.’

‘They must have been undisturbed for some time,’ said Mary, very low, ‘for Evlyn had told her all the story of his quarrel with his father ; of George Haslam’s hurtful influence at Rocklands ; and of his recall home being left too late for him to be recognised by his father. He gave the honourable reason of his silence to her so long as his father lived ; but he said he should have told her all, either if his father forgave him or died—in any case before they married. She did not condemn or censure him. She trusted him entirely, and she was parting with him to return to me—happy once more in her perfect faith in him—when there came in to them the man who had wrought him so much injury. Barbara, Barbara,—in a panting whisper—‘read the rest.’

‘Yes,’ said I, struggling after my natural ease as I believe I never struggled before, ‘I will read it, for I understand it all, and it is not we who are to judge her—neither you nor I, dear—for we have never had that moment’s horrible temptation. There are but a few lines more, but the writing trembles so that it makes me tremble too. Lay your head down, my darling, while I read it. Your—your eyes distract me. This—is all.’

‘“I cannot write what this man said to Evlyn, though as long as I live I shall not forget one of the untrue, evil words or the mocking tone. Not one word did Evlyn answer, standing with my hand in his, seeing only me, with a look on his frank, dear face as if he pitied this man. But suddenly—stung, perhaps, by Evlyn’s silence—the man’s derision turned upon me—or upon



Evlyn for my sake, I cannot understand which, though still the little room is echoing to me the false, slanderous words he uttered.

“Then Evlyn turned upon him with an awful passion, and seized him by the collar. George Haslam was by far the bigger, stronger man, and all my heart went out in prayer for peace between them. He laughed when Evlyn held him, and at the sound Evlyn took his hand away and reached for a little pistol I had noticed before, almost like a toy, telling George Haslam to leave the tower, or he would fire. I saw it glittering in his hand, and though I wonder now how I could have feared *his* using it against a human life, and though I know that he would never, never have done so, even under the fiercest provocation, I took it from his hand.

“In a moment—in one second’s time after the pistol was in my hand—the man rushed upon Evlyn—oh! God, it was so quickly done, and my eyes saw it all! Before I could cross the room, the stronger, bigger man alone was there. He had thrown Evlyn from that open window high above the river—I heard the breaking of the wood beyond—and for a moment—or it might have been an hour—I did not know where I was. Then I knew that my beloved lay dead down there—far down in the river, and that his enemy was dead too, across the open doorway, shot at the first words he dared to speak to me, coming towards me, a smiling coward, who had thrown a brave man to his death! I do not feel as if it could have been myself who fired. I have not realized the horror of it yet, but it will come to me. Oh! pitiful heaven, what will it be to live through the nights to come!

“I must write it now before I leave the spot. I shot him! I shot him as he came towards me with scoffing words of Evlyn, and a hateful smile upon his face, and he lies there across the open doorway. I cannot pass him, but, except that horrible window above the sheer decline to the river, these windows are near the ground, and I can drop easily. I write this that some day the truth may be known. If it could free any guiltless person I would wait and tell it—even to break my sister’s heart. But there is no one to suffer—save myself, and no penalty the law could give would be a sorer punishment than will be my own memory, and this my loss, and the bearing this weight of guilt and secrecy unknown to the only one in all the world who loves me now, and whose love I cannot forfeit for the little time that I can bear this load. I will remember where I put this paper, so that I may tell at last, if—no, I need not tell. Both are dead. The world will know that some one who has escaped them hated this villain for his cruelty to Evlyn, and killed him because he had killed Evlyn first. If they seek me—if they find me in our Irish home, and——”

The hand and heart failed here. There was no other word save that, across the sheet, was written almost steadily—‘Helen Kevene. Written in the Belvidere, Rocklands, Devon, on June the twenty-seventh, eighteen hundred and seventy-eight.’

When I had read this, there was a long silence between us ; at least, it seemed to me very long, for, try as I would, I could not break it myself. Then Mary spoke, as wearily as if this hour had aged her fifty years.

‘You see, Barbara,’ she said, but her voice had lost its old clear ring, ‘Evlyn Discombe is innocent. I have the long-sought proof.’

‘Yes,’ I said, heavily, with a faint shadow upon me of what this revelation had been to Helen Kevene’s sister.

‘He will be free now, after these long cruel years.’

‘Yes,’ said I, closing her feverish eyes with my cold hand.

‘I can take him his release.’

‘Yes,’ said I, again mechanically.

‘Helen has given him that at last.’

‘Shall I write to Denis, Mary?’ I asked, on a sudden impulse.

‘He will do all you wish. No one can help us now as he can. Oh ! let me write to him to-day—now.’

‘No, no,’ said Mary, hurriedly, and rose at once, and turned from me. ‘You don’t understand. Oh ! Barbara, you never understood.’

‘No,’ said I, with an effort to betray nothing beyond my customary matter-of-factness. ‘I only understand that he loved you exceedingly, and that you *would* not like him, because you felt it a sort of duty to dislike all men.’

It was a lame explanation, as I knew full well, and I little expected Mary to take it so humbly and patiently as she did.

‘That old, sad, deeply rooted certainty that my sister’s lover had killed her by his inconstancy made me hate all men, yes,’ she said slowly, as if weighing every word. ‘But after that day in Portland, I knew there was a work for me to do, perhaps a life-long task, and it was not my secret, not mine, Barbara ; how could I tell him, or even you ? But now’—once more, with both her palms upon her temples, she pushed the thick hair back, as if it were its weight alone oppressing her—‘the dishonour and the shame and guilt are *mine*. We were as one, Helen and I, in our best and brightest days, and it seems as if we must have been one—Barbara, do you understand?—in that terrible guiltiness. Could the longest lifetime of loneliness and lovelessness for me wash out that crime?’

‘You have not to wash out your sister’s faults,’ I said, sturdily, though without the faintest idea whether I spoke sense or not, ‘and this is not your disgrace, Mary. Denis will know that, and oh, my dear, he loves you so !’

‘Loves me?’ she said, with a lingering softness in her voice.

He—loves—me? And I—Barbara' (with one of her sudden changes of tone), 'if in your loving compassion for me you come to me in my last illness, whether this day's discovery kills me soon, or whether the long years have to be lived, you will see here—here, close to my heart, the spray of heath that Denis gave me on—that day. Not a valuable gift, was it? But worth to me all the world holds besides. Let it lie there, Barbara. Let it lie there upon my heart, even in my grave. It has faded, though so near my heart, where the love can never fade—can never die, though hope for me has died for ever. You are true and good, my Barbara, yet I meant never to tell even you. Now, dear, let us drop his name between us. It will only make the old wounds ache. I have much to do, but you are free now, Barry. I am going to Evlyn. How can I pause one hour before rescuing him, when he is so weary of that ghastly punishment that he seeks death—and such a death! Oh, Helen, Helen!'

'But, Mary,' said I, quietly, for I felt quite sure that she looked upon this as our parting, 'if I may not come with you I shall have to follow in your steps alone, and horribly lonely I shall be. I'm an unfortunate person to travel by myself; so you will not be so cruel as to send me away from you. I shall not leave you unless you do send me, and then I shall follow you everywhere all by myself.'

'You—will come?' she cried, looking almost incredulously into my face. 'Oh, my dear, my dear!' and then the reviving tears came to her sorrowful eyes at last.

Sunday, August 7th.

To-morrow morning we leave for London, and so this is our last night here. A carriage is engaged to take us very early in to Westercombe—indeed we should have left yesterday, but that Mary found there were no Sunday trains. She sent a mounted messenger to telegraph to her solicitor, and posted other telegrams, and now all our preparations are complete, and we have but to—go.

I have come up to my room to be alone a little, puzzled by my regret at leaving, because I have witnessed—and felt—so much of sorrow here. The August moon looks down from the wide far blue, while now and then a little white cloud flies before it, graceful and beautiful beyond all words. No wonder my gaze lingers on the fair silent scene, and that I am very, very glad we have had this peaceful Sunday for our last day. It has strengthened us both.

Mr. Gunn is still with Mary in the garden. I wonder whether he is astonished at that intense silence which enfolds her to-day. I suppose I must go down to them again. I wonder what they

think I came away for—if they think at all of my coming. I tried to be cheerful in the garden with them. Indeed, when he joined us, I received him with quite a gay and unrestrained remark about the harvest moon.

‘Is it the harvest moon, Mr. Gunn?’ asked Mary, with a great effort to break through her own abstraction. ‘I thought September’s was the harvest moon.’

‘In Spain,’ he said, without directly answering, ‘I found the May moon is their harvest moon.’

‘Some of the leaves have fallen already,’ I said, still in my thrillingly cheerful vein, and then went away and gathered a handful of mignonette and nasturtium to take with me as a memento of this time—I mean of the cottage and the garden. I wonder how nasturtiums will press, but it does not signify; they will remind me just the same.

I will go back now, yet I dread the good-bye. How ridiculous to dread a good-bye to some one simply because we have lived in the same lodgings for a few days!

I found them in the garden still, but when I saw how tired Mary looked I tempted her in, though the summer night was beautiful to me.

‘Good-night and good-bye, Mr. Gunn,’ she said, giving him one hand, and with the other taking mine. ‘Thank you very much for the kind help you have given me in your words, and the still kinder help you have offered to give me in other ways; but I—have Barbara.’

He looked at us both for a moment, then looked away, while a nonsensical lump rose in my throat.

‘She has no help from me,’ I said, spasmodically, ‘though she always pretends she has, just to please me, because she is generous. I would help her though, if I could.’

‘Yes,’ he said, quietly, and took the hand I gave him; his hand-clasp, always so real and sincere, saying good-bye without a word, and in its full and sacred meaning, too.

That is over now, and there is only Miss Brock to part from in the early morning. Even she seems fretting to lose Mary, for she has been very touchy with me all day, and came home from chapel suspiciously early this evening, telling us ‘the preachin’ didn’t fit her; ’twas nought but a timid utterance.’

Monday, August 8th.

At Westercombe this morning we met Denis. We had been driven so fast, at Mary’s instigation, that we arrived quite early at the station, and soon afterwards Denis entered it. I grew suddenly anxious about Silla and our luggage, and left him with

Mary, but I was even sorry I had done so—how seldom I do anything I am not afterwards sorry for!—when he fetched me, our time being up, for he looked quite changed and ill, and when I questioned him he answered me, almost impatiently, that he was not leaving by this train. Why should I fancy it?

It was not, under the circumstances, a very extraordinary fancy; but, of course, I did not say so, for I guessed the truth, I think.

He led me to the carriage where Mary sat alone, anxiously and courteously saw that we had all we wanted, and bade us good-bye, waiting until the train left. Then I looked at Mary.

‘Barry,’ she said, answering the glance, ‘he was very kind and—patient, but he knows now that I can never be more to him than a stranger. I told him so; earnestly, as if they were my dying words.’

‘Does he know?’ I questioned, understanding what this interview had been to her.

‘He knows only that I cannot be his wife, not even his friend, for I could not trust myself, and he will never ask me again. He has promised.’

Tuesday, August 9th.

I wrote those few words about meeting Denis at Westercombe, on our arrival yesterday, but no more. I ought to have added that Mary’s solicitor, Mr. France, met us, had already himself seen the Home Secretary, and assured us that the preliminary steps towards Evelyn Discombe’s discharge were taken. He had acted most promptly and kindly, as Mary said, but she herself will have much to do legally—I mean officially. I suppose I was too tired to write this, or that my thoughts were too much harassed by the certainty that this liberty must be terribly overshadowed for Helen Keveene’s lover.

I forgot to say that Mr. France had telegraphed to the Isle of Wight, where Ernest Discombe is reading with a coach, and to-day he goes down for an interview with Evelyn. Mary seems greatly troubled as to how Mr. Discombe will bear the shock, almost wishing she could go herself to break it to him, but no words can tell how glad I am that she cannot.

‘Oh, it will be all right,’ Mr. France said, actually laughing. ‘The shock will be too grateful a one for us to fear its effect.’

‘Could it not be?’ I began, halting painfully. ‘Was it not possible that he need know only that he was freed by the confession of the really guilty—of another person? Need he ever know who it was?’ But Mary looked so sad over this, and Mr. France so kindly made me feel myself an idiot, that I said no more. Mr. France has had a letter from Ernest Discombe, who is now on his way up. His great wish, it seems, is for his

brother to go with him at once to their own home, and for his return to be made a matter of rejoicing there, where he should be established as master.

‘You see,’ Mr. France said, ‘George Haslam was to be the boy’s guardian, and his death, before the testator’s, leaves Ernest in his brother’s care, and he can occupy the place of honour at present if the lad will. He certainly will if he has his desire, but in my own mind I doubt the success of that going-home-with-rejoicing business.’

Mr. France has promised to come straight to us on his return from Portland, and meanwhile we get through the hours as best we can, weakly trying to amuse and mislead each other into the belief that everything is very nice and satisfactory now.

Wednesday, August 10th.

This evening Mr. France returned, but gave us merely the bare outlines of his visit to Portland. He was not hopeful, as he had been when he left us yesterday, and I thought there must be some hitch in the proceedings. But I could not glean that there was, and Mary did not seem aware of any change in Mr. France. Probably, in her highly-wrought nervous condition, it seems natural to her for every one to feel grave and depressed, because a man has for three years undergone an unmerited punishment.

Friday, August 12th.

Mr. France came in unexpectedly early, and, as Mary happened to be in her own room, I saw him alone for a few minutes, when he seemed glad to speak unreservedly to me. Evlyn Discombe was virtually discharged, he said, from his undeserved imprisonment, was a free man, and would be in all men’s sight an innocent one; but there was no disguising the fact that he was in a very precarious state of health, and Mr. France begged me to assist him in breaking this fact to his client. In my cowardly fashion I begged for a reprieve. Before she saw him there might be a change, I urged. Freedom might give him back almost at once his look of health. Surely we need not prepare her unnecessarily. Mr. France gave in to me, though dubiously; so we are not to tell Mary. My weak mind seizes with relief upon even the smallest respite.

Thursday, August 25th. Weymouth.

For how many days have I forgotten my diary? If I looked back now, how like a dream would seem that morning on Portland Island when I saw Evlyn Discombe crossing the quarry in

his convict dress, watched and guarded as a dangerous felon, while he so wearily gazed far away from the friend who was near him, and was to bring him at last his freedom !

His freedom !

I think—I do not know how to say it even in my thoughts, much less to write it ; but I think his freedom had been sent to him before that summer morning, and is very near now.

I try not to think this. I try with all my might and main, but how can one put a thought away when it is in every face around one ? We are all in Weymouth again. My mother and sisters had not left, and so when it was decided that Mr. Discombe should travel no further, and Mary was eager to be where he was, mother invited her to come with me. She was most pathetically grateful.

‘It is so kind,’ she said again and again, until the tears actually came into mother’s eyes, and Selina told me afterwards that she should not have known Mary Keveene for the proud, cold, cynical beauty of only a month ago. My poor, poor Mary ! That to her own sorrow and loneliness and humiliation should be added this anguish of seeing that her sister’s terrible, unpremeditated crime should have killed the man who loved her, and who for three years had endured silently for her sin ! For that his freedom will not bring him health we know, alas ! too well.

His brother is devoted to him ; Mary would only too gladly give her life to save his ; but of what avail are all our longings and efforts and devotion—when—but, as I say to myself, again and again, it is only that a Friend, far more loving and tender and pitiful even than the one who has tried so hard to help him, or than any one of us who try so hard to keep him, has sent to summon him to a liberty where the old pain can never touch him more. I believe it was a great shock when Mary went to him first after our arrival here. He had not heard of her sister’s death, and in the first moment he mistook her for Helen. I noticed she had put on a very simple dress, and I guessed it was one she had worn in the old happy days in Ireland, when the twin sisters dressed alike, and perhaps this helped the delusion. She was sorry afterwards, I know, for she had never imagined that result, and has dressed quite differently since ; always quietly and humbly—if one may say so—but even so, and in her great sorrow, she is beautiful as ever.

That must have been a heart-breaking interview when she told him the truth, and I am very, very glad she has not spoken to me of it. Only once in my presence has she alluded to that solitary and laborious life he has lived, and even then he tried to turn her sad, regretful words aside, and cheer her with memories of the old happy time in Ireland.

‘From the moment that—after those doubting years—I saw

you, Evlyn,' she said, 'I sought the truth. With certain instinct of your innocence, I pursued it.'

'To your own sorrow, dear. Now speak of something else.'

'Not yet—please,' she entreated. 'You never blame her, and you let me tell you how she suffered, but—'

'We can feel how she expiated all in such sad suffering,' he gently said. 'No, how could I blame her? It was only one moment of temptation. Another moment of thought, and she would have acted differently. If his words were maddening to me, Mary, think what they were to her—afterwards, and when she thought I was killed by him—my poor, poor darling! How happy you have made me by telling me she thought me dead! She never knew of the punishment given me—I felt that always, yet it is good to hear it. She would have died to spare me, now I know it;' and by the brightening of the wan face I saw how that consciousness of her absence and silence had told most of all upon him through those long years. 'She saw me killed, as she thought,' he reiterated, still with that touching, nameless gladness on his face, 'and for a moment she was not herself—to know it bitterly afterwards. It was—enough to kill her.'

'It did kill her. The loss of you and the bearing of that guilty secret killed her so soon—so long ago.'

'Is it selfish to be so glad?' he murmured, and then was silent, looking far off where sea and sky so softly met.

'Evlyn, how you must have wondered over our silence, and our not appearing—you know what I mean.'

'At my trial,' he answered, calmly. 'No, I thought her safe with you. You did not know me as Discombe, and I hoped you would not—and I prayed she might not—see the papers. She would have blamed herself,' he added, simply, 'and I never blamed her. I *was* the murderer, Mary; for, in that moment of awful passion I should have used the pistol, if she had not taken it from me. I always remembered she had saved me from that act. I well might bear the punishment of it, for I should have committed it but for her. I ought to have borne it, Mary, to the end, but I grew weak, and tired, and cowardly. A lifetime seemed so endless. Death looked so much easier; even—any death.'

'It was my horrible fear of that which made—memory come back to me.'

'But now how different it has made me feel to see you once again, dear sister, and to feel she would have—— She wrote that to save anyone, and would have stayed and saved me, only she thought me dead—both of us dead. Who was there to save? Oh, Mary, to think how every day she may have been expecting to be found and—captured!'

'If she had but told me,' breathed Mary; and I could even see how she trembled, while he was perfectly calm.



Then, while I sat pondering on that momentary madness of passion which had cost them both so much—cost them their lives, as I knew now; how could I help but know it?—he, smiling, held out his hand to me to come nearer to them in the window (Mary must have quite misrepresented me to him, for he treats me just as if I had been doing as much as she has for his sake), and talked of their old days in Ireland, explaining things to me as if I had known them then, but might have forgotten some of the places or people. Oh me, it was so brightly done, and yet—I feel that he spoke only the truth to-day, when, watching a few leaves fall in the gardens, where he may only sit during the midday sunshine, he said it was peace to him to know that he was dying with the dying summer.

Monday, September 5th.

I seldom remember my diary now. With the pitiful restlessness of an invalid, Evlyn Discombe seems to have set his heart upon returning to his old home; but day after day they wait for him to be better before he attempts the journey. His young brother stays always with him, but Denis is now his best companion, and is devoted to him in such an easy, protecting, manly way that no wonder Mary's gratitude, as she hides it from him, must sometimes be poured out so piteously to me. She feels his strength doubly in her own weakness, and no wonder Evlyn seems guessing a little of the truth, while his friendship with Denis is his greatest blessing. His greatest, I think—and and I know Mary herself would say it—sweet as are her care and affection to him. For who could be like Denis to him now? So gentle, so brotherly, so patient, and yet so strong, and so cheery, and so wise. This evening Denis was summoned to London on professional business, and we all miss him more than we confess to each other. I, just as I have always missed his kind good presence, but Mary with a strange restless defiance of her consciousness of this. She always, when she can, avoids Denis, and she never looks at him, nor seems to see his eyes rest upon her—that they do continually and sadly I know only too well—and though for his kindness to Mr. Discombe she will not always leave him even when she might, I see that she always feels as if they two were very far apart.

To-day Ernest has been telling his brother—we two sat working in the window near his couch—of how wisely and strongly Denis had written on that one crying evil which he always saw in our convict system (the promiscuous mingling of the prisoners) and of how hopeful he is of its being amended.

'He writes with no weak sentiment,' the boy said, warmly, 'but with a sympathy and thoughtfulness which are intensely powerful.'

'Then,' said Evlyn, gently, 'I will thank him.' And I saw a beautiful unusual flush in Mary's white cheeks. To my astonishment, Evlyn—after speaking of this reform which Denis strives to forward—spoke for the first time voluntarily of his own prison life.

'One could not fancy,' he said, with a shiver, 'even the most barbarous and savage tribe using such appalling language as was around me; such oaths; such—ribald blasphemy; and I could not close my ears to it, try as I would. It was in my hearing night and day, not only when I was among the others, but even pressed upon me through the walls of my cell; sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, and the cell was but four feet wide. Where could I go from it? How could I help the horror of learning the evil taught me, while—I suppose I had been placed there to be cured of my own wickedness.'

'But you could read,' suggested Ernest, his boyish lips set firmly in his distress.

'Yes, when my gas-jet was lighted. With only the daylight, I could not see to read in my cell.'

'Had you any papers?'

'No; as they were forbidden, I would not bribe the men to disobey their orders. I seemed to have lost all links with the outer world.'

'Oh! Evlyn, and this was to last your lifetime!'

'But did not,' said the elder brother, with a patient smile. 'How one is mistaken! I never thought I should live through the nine months' probation before going to Portland—indeed, I felt as if that one horrible journey, handcuffed in the prison van, from Newgate to Brixton, would kill me—and yet I lived to be free.'

I suppose we were very remiss to let him speak of this, even for so short a time (I am sure Denis would not have done so), for later on his sleep was wild and troubled, and with aching hearts we listened to the broken words that told us how the old miserable life held him in its grip once more. Again and again Mary roused him, but it was only a minute before the sad unconsciousness grasped him again, and we knew this was not a natural sleep, from which we could awake him to the different scene. It must have its way we saw. Now and then he talked fast and unintelligibly, moving his arms regularly and heavily, and we saw he thought he used his heavy pick upon the stone. Then he cried sharply that the coast was inaccessible; then bade us watch the red light on the breakwater, telling us that when it paled we could be sheltered there, just as the ships were sheltered. Then he whispered gently, and I knew he was whispering to his old love, before I heard him tell her he always saw her just as she sat that afternoon playing the organ in the little church. And then he laughed, and said he had laughed more in that one

day, with her and Mary, than in all his life before. Oh, it was very pitiful! Most so for the lad, who went away unable to bear this; and for Mary sitting with her eyes upon his thin flushed face, and her fingers tightly locked; but it was pitiful even to me.

Wednesday, September 7th.

To-day Denis came back, I had been reading aloud to Evlyn, in the quiet inner sitting-room where he generally lies. He says he likes me to read to him, of course, because he sees how anxious I am to be of a little use, and because sometimes Mary breaks down so sadly if she tries to read; and when, in one of my pauses, something he said of Denis showed me that he had guessed the secret of Denis's love for Mary, I could not help telling the truth—Evlyn must have won me to it by his tender affection for Helen's sister and his gratitude to Denis. I told him of her love, and how she felt too much abased to ever let him know it, and had won from him a promise that he never again would ask her for it. I told him all this, though indeed I think he understood it almost as well as I did, so anxiously had he watched her lately. Soon afterwards Denis came in, and I knew quite well that Evlyn would tell him, at least I felt sure that Denis would be made to comprehend.

I went into the outer sitting-room and joined Mary. Mother and Reby had persuaded Ernest to have a walk with them, for the boy looks very pale, and he had gone the less unwillingly as he wished to meet a certain train which was bringing grapes for Evlyn. Mary was writing at the centre table, and I sat down at the window. I had no other room to go to, else I should have left her, fancying it would be better that, when Denis came in, he might speak to her alone if he wished. We are all far more at home now in these large quiet rooms, which mother herself had taken for the invalid, than in our own. Mary wrote on and on, until at last we heard Denis's footstep cross the inner sitting-room, and then she looked up from the paper, and seemed waiting, even before he had opened the door between the two rooms. I believe she had forgotten my presence, and I never can doubt that in her heart—so near to his—she understood it all, and knew that he was coming to her differently from what he had ever come before.

Her eyes were fixed upon the door before he opened it, and when he entered it seemed as if she could not take her eyes from his face—such a changed face, so tender, so glad, so confident! Even I could scarcely recognise the Denis I had held first in my heart for so many years.

He came up to Mary and paused beside her, looking down into her eyes, and holding out both his hands. Quietly—it

seemed almost unconsciously—she laid down her pen, still never looking away from his face, and put her hands into his—not gently only, but with childish shyness. He waited while she raised her face still higher, slowly ; until her eyes—so fully meeting his—had read the great desire and longing there. Then a wonderful pathetic gladness irradiated hers.

‘Oh ! Denis, can it be that you forgive me ?’

‘Mary—my own Mary, I have heard all, and it is I who am unworthy—not you, my soul’s beloved.’

‘I have suffered, Denis, and not least in my—great love—for you.’

‘But you will not let it be so any longer ?’ he cried, unable to suppress his great emotion. ‘If you had only told me all at first—my poor, brave darling. How can I make you understand ? Release me from that wretched promise not to tell you of my love again ?’

‘No,’ she said, very humbly. ‘You will keep your promise ; you are too honourable to break it. Denis, is not my name disgraced and dishonoured in your sight ?’

‘Indeed, it is not. It is even more precious to me than before. But I do not want your name ; I want to give you mine.’

‘It does not humble you in your own sight to—care for me ?’

‘If not ?’ he questioned, his eyes answering that, as even words could scarcely do.

‘If not,’ she said, in low, shy tones, ‘it makes me proud to care for you. It has made me proud—always—hopeless as I was.’

‘My love,’ he cried, his chest heaving as he laid her head against it, ‘through all my heart let me feel the truth of this. I did not break my promise, did I ?’

‘No,’ she said, gently. ‘It was I who—offered you my love.’

‘And you know now, my dearest,’ he said, lifting her face after what seemed a long silence, ‘*who* “loved one only, and who claved to her” ?’

‘And you know now, Denis,’ she said, not smiling, but raising warm, sweet eyes to his, ‘*who* “loves her lord above everything.” Oh, Denis, how I loved you even on that far-off day, when we jested so !’ Then there broke from her tremulous lips a tearless little sob, but I could not sorrow, for it was surely her supreme content breaking through these sad recollections.

As for me, I sat crying silently at the window. Some women are so idiotic, they cry in the very times when they ought to be most grateful. I did my best, too, trying to cheer myself up with the thought that she would have better remembrances of Denis now than that dead bit of heath.

Sunday, September 11th.

It is very beautiful to me now, and yet it is strangely sad, to see Mary’s unfamiliar happiness, while yet her sorrow is so fresh,

and her anxiety for Evlyn so unintermittent. And to see his content so deeply rooted, seeming perfect now that he knows all will be well with Helen's sister. As for Denis, I am quite certain now that I could never all my life have had the faintest notion what Denis could be, unless I had been, as I so happily have, a friend of Mary's.

Oh me, what love can give into our hearts sometimes !

I wonder why I am thinking so much to-day of our Sundays at Rocklands. What peaceful days they were, in spite of their overlying sorrow and anxiety and—secrecy ! At least I think now that they were ; but perhaps all days are so when we look back upon them. Of course a great cloud did overshadow those, in Mary's sorrow and my own suspicion, yet I see them lie quite fair in the far past—it seems far to me. How could I ever have mistrusted Mary ? I think that day by day I love her more. In her love for Denis, as in her care for Evlyn, and as in the old anxiety, she never forgets me ; never for one minute lets me feel less her friend and her companion, or less loved by her. Of course it is only a fancy of mine, but I wish Mr. Gunn were as near to Evlyn as he would be were the brothers now at their old home. It seems to me that he would talk to him differently from what this clergyman does ; perhaps not more religiously, but so—so refreshingly, strengtheningly, helpfully ; in his natural, healthy, simple way. I suppose it is through its being Sunday I have thought of him to-day. It has been a very long day, as Sundays sometimes are. But how natural it is for us all to be so grave and troubled, while, in our midst, one we have all grown fond of is indeed, as he said, dying with the dying summer. Not that death has any terror for Evlyn. Do we not know how he has longed for it, and does he not himself remind us that it is 'but a grey eve, between two shining days' ? But when I look into his worn young face, and think how few shining days he has known lately, I may well feel heavy-hearted. And death is so lonely !

Tuesday, September 13th.

How strange that I should have written as I did on Sunday, for it was on that day that Mr. Gunn determined to come to Mary, and see if he could be of any help to her. And all through a letter Silla had written to Miss Brock ! What trifles sometimes bring about events that are—so good !

This morning he came in, and, if no one was more surprised than Mary, no one was more glad—I think.

He must be back in Rocklands for next Sunday, but I fancy he will stay to the limit of his opportunity. It is good to us all to see and hear him, and already—yes, indeed, already—death wears a different aspect in his presence. It cannot pain us, or

make us afraid, when we look on Evlyn's face, although we know so well that

‘ Soon, in solemn loneliness,  
The river must be passed.’

\* \* \* \* \*

That was all I wrote last summer, and it is of that time that Mary has bidden me tell. I kissed her, as I said, without a word, but I felt it was a promise, and I took out the diary I had locked away a year ago, and have re-lived that summer-time.

Oh me, how vividly those troubled days came back to me, though I can see now, as I have wished, a glory shining on the darkest hour of all !

Surely only a few words need I add.

There is still a shadow of the old gravity on Mary's lovely face, but her husband understands ; and it cannot give back the old cynicism, or prevent everyone reading in the beautiful eyes the deep, sweet happiness of her love for him, her trust in him, and her perfect, perfect confidence in his great love for her. Steadily, and even rapidly, Denis rises in his profession—while Mary's wealth is destined by them both for a noble purpose by-and-by ; and I would like to feel that there are many such homes as theirs. In all his holidays, this home is Ernest Discombe's too, and scarcely less a guardian than an elder brother is Denis to the lad whose own brother died so peacefully on the very day after that last entry in my diary. And what a home Mary makes for him ! Sister, mother, friend—not one, but all—she seems to this boy whom she had never seen a year ago.

My mother and sisters are abroad now with Uncle Steven and Archie, and they write very happily and cheerily to me, for I am not with them ! I am in a beautiful old brown parsonage among the cliffs not far from Westercombe. Somehow my heart seems too full to write—even here, and even now—of my own complete happiness, for I have not grown familiar with it yet.

The cheery, brave, and tender voice that comforted us all in our most troubled time is ready always now to comfort me. The hand-clasp which I always thought so strengthening is mine when I will. And the kind, good face I never, from the first instant I saw it, forgot, looks its kindest, and smiles its cheeriest upon me.

I could not believe it at first—why *should* he care for me?—but I knew it gradually, and I think he knows how grateful and how glad I was. And surely, if he knows it, that is enough.

Only one thing troubles me. I have still no power of inspiring awe into those sturdy little fellows whom I love almost as their father does, for they call us John and Barbara !—they even call me Barry sometimes, but that, I think, is their father's fault ; and, though I know it is quite wrong, I am sadly afraid that I like it,

# THE SORROW OF A SECRET.

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## HER STORY.

July 20th.

THOUGH I ought to be laying the herbs out in the shade, that they may dry before their flowers burst, I cannot help being idle ; and, with my arms full of them, I stand against the wall of the upper orchard, looking down upon our Golden Valley, and wondering whether the dear familiar scene could ever before have looked quite so beautiful as it looks this afternoon. Surely it was on such a day as this that King David heard the valleys laugh and sing as they stood thick with corn, in a land as fair as ours ! Surely on such a day as this, even I—as he did—can hear the country's sweet low song of praise to Him who has crowned the year with His goodness ! And it must have been on such a day as this that some one gave our valley first its name of the Golden Valley.

What an idle afternoon I have spent ! I have not gathered nearly all the camomile flowers, when I hear father's whistle coming from the porch far behind me. This is the signal that he is ready for tea ; so I climb the orchard wall, and wave my handkerchief to summon Tom. He answers me at last from his seat on the reaping-machine ; then I spring to the ground again, and hasten to join father, leaving my herbs spread on the turf.

I pass two of the maids gathering peas for supper, and I wonder how they can be busy over any task on such an afternoon as this ; then I watch a laden wagon come up from the meadow, and wind on to the yard. Indeed, when I join father at last, I know how I must have loitered by the way, because my hands are filled with roses. He is still standing in the porch, looking out over his harvest-fields, with that calm, happy look of his which I often think is brighter than a smile.

'What a beautiful July this is, Thisbe !' he says, looking so thoroughly a part of the sunny, peaceful scene, 'I can scarcely recollect such a harvest.'

'Then what wonder is it, father, that I don't remember such a lovely summer before in all my life?'

'Of course not; your fullest harvests are all to come, dear,' father says, throwing his arm around me, as he always does when I am near him—unless he can throw it around mother, which, of course, he likes far better. 'Every summer, as it comes, will be the happiest summer of your life.'

With a laugh I put my hand upon his lips to silence him. Next summer seems so far away; and between now and then so much is possible!

Our silence is broken by mother's bright, quick voice from the open window.

'You should have brought Tom in with you, Thisbe. Tea is waiting.'

I try to slip from father's arm, that I may meet and hasten my brother, but father holds me tightly.

'Let Tom find his own way in. We may have to wait till tomorrow for tea, if you escape again; for I am quite sure I heard the tread of Briton's horse. Oh, it's of no use digging that scoop of a hat into me! It may be tied tight enough to save our complexions, but it cannot hide our blushes.'

'Because there are none to hide, father,' I laugh, throwing back my hat, and kissing him. 'Why, I should never cease blushing, if I did so at the sound of David's horse! Now do let me go and make the tea.'

'Too late,' says mother, joining us, and looking so pretty in her snowy muslin sleeves and cap and apron. 'I have made it; but it's all right, pet, for I have put in a spoonful extra for David.'

'Then for once we may feel grateful to David, father,' I say, merrily; 'for he is in Exeter, and we shall have that extra spoonful of tea to ourselves. There's Tom!'

I meet him at the gate, noticing how his sunburnt, handsome face has the same look of calm content that father's has.

'You are so like father, Tom,' I say, in my idle, irrelevant way, 'that I wish with all my heart I were more like mother. Then we should know how we would look in about twenty years.'

'Not a bit depending on the life between, eh, Thisbe?' he asks me, looking, as I do, at the two who are watching us from the porch. 'You just live as good and calm a life as mother's has been, and by the end of five-and-twenty years you may be as pleasant to look upon. But if——'

'Go on, Tom,' I whisper, jogging his elbow when he stops so mysteriously. 'What were you going to say?'

'Never mind. It was nothing very wise or even probable,' Tom says 'just for an instant laying his hand upon my hair—Tom's touch is always so kind and gentle, though his hands are brown and rather hard with work. 'We are content with you as you are, and that is all you need worry about,'



And then, looking away from Tom's face, with a smile for his lame conclusion, I see a look of something even sweeter than content on the dear faces that are watching us ; and the love that is ever about me seems just at this moment to be the perfecting of this wonderful summer day.

Tea is nearly over—at least, I am just filling father's cup for the third time—when Tom casually inquires who has looked at the *Times* to-day ?

'I only wanted to know,' he goes on, when father has been made to confess that he fell asleep over it, 'whether any of you had been struck by an advertisement headed "Devonshire." Stay ! I'll find it.'

It takes Tom a good while to find the advertisement—I think because he reads so many things in passing—but eventually, after several reminders that we are waiting and listening, he seems to come suddenly upon it, and reads it aloud :—

"DEVONSHIRE.—A gentleman, needing mental rest and country air, wishes to reside in a pleasant farm-house, where he might, for two months, live as one of the family. Would entail no extra trouble or expense. Preference given to Devonshire, and where trout-fishing is obtainable. Terms, offered for the months of August and September, twenty guineas."

'Very fair terms too,' father says, 'for an arrangement that sounds so simple ; and, if mother likes, I will answer it. No trout-fishing in all Devonshire is better than ours, and no air more health-restoring. The man has worn himself out, I suppose, with the London season ; or he is an artist perhaps, or opera-singer—who knows ?'

'At any rate,' mother puts in, 'he seems to want nothing we could not give him, and certainly our air would do him good. But then the constant presence of a stranger—'

'I see what mother means,' Tom says, laying down the paper as mother pauses. 'But two months is not a long time, mother and the twenty guineas will buy Thisbe her wedding-gown.'

I am very angry with Tom for this suggestion, though his mischievous glance ruins my frown.

'Father,' I whisper, 'won't it buy mother that quiet pony of Mrs. Briton's ? She could drive that herself.'

'And do you suppose,' laughs father, 'that she would be half as happy driving herself as she is being driven by me ? Not she. But I'll tell you what she would like,' he goes on, his wide, kind glance taking us all in for a second, and then resting on mother's listening face. 'You and Tom, my pet, shall have a little holiday, and he shall show you London. You are eighteen now, and it is time you saw something as rare, if not as beautiful, as our hills and valleys. I would like Tom to have the change, and could trust you best with him. Tom shall take the twenty guineas and the little girl, and do his best—eh, my boy ?'

‘But we haven’t got the guineas yet,’ mother says, smiling ; and speaking, I think, because she sees that Tom cannot, while I can only put my hand in father’s a little bewildered. ‘If we have them, I can think of no pleasanter way of spending them. So will you answer the advertisement in father’s name, Tom?’—for Tom writes all father’s letters now, just as mother likes me to write hers, that I may feel of use to her, because I like that so much.

Yes, Tom will write it at night, he says, when the harvest-work is over. Then he goes out once more, and father mounts Charlie and follows to the valley, while mother sits in the porch with me, wooed from every usual task by the exquisite beauty of this summer evening. So sweet and tranquil is this resting time, so full are our hearts of love and happiness, while we do not speak a word, that, when at last the falling back of the lawn-gate breaks the stillness, it seems a discord on the harmony of the hour—a ridiculous thought, as I say to myself in hasty reproach, while I rise to greet Edith Karne.

‘I cannot stay, Mrs. Lee,’ she says, when mother proposes leaving us two girls for a chat. ‘I have only run over to say good-bye. I feel sure aunt will not let me go out to-morrow, and the next morning I start for Boulogne. Mamma wants me with her now, for a wonder.’

‘And I suppose you are delighted to go, Edith?’ I say ; for Edith tells us so very often how dull she is at the rectory with her uncle and aunt.

‘No ; I am not delighted to go,’ Edith answers, with a shrug of her shoulders. ‘It is scarcely less dull at Boulogne than at the rectory.’

‘I should have fancied,’ I begin, watching the shadow of the old house lengthen on the turf. But Edith interrupts me laughing.

‘Oh, your fancies, Thisbe, who can follow them ? And of facts, what can you know ?’

‘Nothing,’ I answer, as she pauses. I say it only as the simple truth, and with perfect content that it should be nothing.’

‘No,’ she assents, in her clear, quick voice. You don’t know what dullness means. What do *you* know of prim, closed rooms, where not one word is ever uttered either lovingly or merrily, where dinner is discussed as the one event of life, and where my deficiencies are rehearsed daily with signs and groans ?’

‘It seems impossible, Edith,’ I answer, wondering, ‘for the rector is always kind, and Mrs. Karne so gentle. I think they try—’

‘They try *me*,’ Edith interrupts, with a laugh of quick contempt. ‘All day long they try me ; and I’m sick of it !’

‘Then, as I said before, Edith, you must be glad to go.’

‘I shall only have to come back,’ she says, pushing aside a jessamine spray that comes creeping round the porch. ‘I shall

have to come back to the long, stupid days with nothing in them—to uncle's slow dinners and aunt's plaintive sighs.'

'Hush, Edith!' mother puts in, gently. 'Will you walk down the valley and say good-bye to Tom? Thisbe will be glad of the stroll with you.'

'Your mother doesn't like to hear me call everybody at the rectory stupid, Thisbe,' Edith says, as we walk slowly to the harvest-fields, and I am looking out to the far horizon, where the golden upland touches the summer sky. 'Yet it is awfully so. If it were not, I could not bear the thought of going to Boulogne, for mamma is as cold as ice to me, and my brother always has his own selfish amusements apart from anyone else. Oh, how shocked you try to look, you baby Mentor; but it's of no use! It is not my own fault, as I daresay you insinuate, that there is no pleasure in my life here or there. You know nothing about it. You think you would find something to employ you and help others, even in such a life as mine at the rectory; and, as the thought is born of ignorance, I will excuse you. There's Tom! How courteously he comes to meet us as soon as he sees us! I think, if my brother were like yours, Thisbe, I—'

I think Edith purposely leaves the sentence unfinished; but it only seems as if she does so to greet Tom; and it is not until she and I are parting, quite an hour afterwards, when I have walked with her to the rectory gate, that her voice takes again the same heavy, almost bitter tone.

'Thisbe, what shall you think if I come back engaged?'

'Engaged?'

'Yes; engaged to be married. How you look at one, child! Does it seem so impossible to you? Do you think all young people are like you and your brother, and never think of any home but their father's? I'm not going to spend all my years within these dull walls you may be sure; nor can I stand a lifetime of mamma's frigidity.'

'And has someone offered you another home, Edith?'

'It will be offered me while I am away. And I am doubtful—'

'Doubtful?' I do not mean to question her: I am only puzzled—knowing so little of the kind of love she speaks of—how a *doubt* is possible.

But Edith thinks I do question her, and turns to me with a laugh.

'He is a friend of my brother's, and the home he would give me would have no dismal uncles and aunts in it, nor hollow-hearted mother and brother. And yet, except those negative advantages, he has nothing very good to give me; so I am doubtful, as I said.'

'If I were doubtful, Edith,' I say, as she seems to wish me to

say something, 'I should never accept any man's love. Could it be fair?'

'Fair enough,' laughs Edith. 'There are different kinds of love, you know.'

'Are there?'

'Of course there are, little Thisbe,' she says, with a sudden change of tone, and a caressing touch upon my shoulder. 'Let them go, as you know so little, but there are. Surely David Briton has taught you something of this. Though,' she adds, laughingly, 'he hasn't yet taught you to blush at his name.'

'I think there can be but one sort of real love,' I answer, as we stand so quiet in the sunset light; but I say it shyly, because I know so little.

August 1st.

I never say it to mother, but it has risen to my lips a dozen times to-day—the wish that father had not decided to write about that advertisement. For to-day the gentleman is to come, and somehow, while I go about preparing for his coming, there is a feeling in my heart as if I were myself helping, not to interrupt the old life for a few weeks, as father so cheerfully says, that we may enjoy it the more when we go back to it, but to break it off for ever. I would not for the world tell mother this silly idea, for fear that she is really (like me) sorry Mr. Standish is coming; but, if she is, she hides it very easily and pleasantly, and seems to me looking quite anxiously for father's return with this stranger.

Tom laughs at me now and then, when he meets me, saying that he can plainly see my heart beat. Of course I know he cannot, but still it does beat quite uncomfortably.

'Oh, mother,' I sigh, without looking up from the dishes of fruit which I am arranging for dessert, when mother comes into the long parlour, and stands to see that the table is properly laid, 'how stiff and formal we shall feel at dinner!'

'Stiff and formal!' echoes mother, with a smile. 'Are all our natures—and our manners—so suddenly to change, my child? How prettily you have mixed the flowers and fruit; but Deborah need not have brought out the best glass. We are not going to make a stranger of Mr. Standish.'

'But suppose he makes strangers of us, mother?' I sigh, as I gather the loose leaves into the big pocket of my gardening apron. 'Suppose he will not let us feel him to be at home among us?'

'Thisbe!'

The utterance of my name is very quiet, yet so full of meaning, that I turn instantly, with a sort of presentiment of the truth, which I see in a moment. Mother has turned away, and is greeting someone who could quite easily have overheard those fretful words of mine. It is too late now to slip off my gardening

apron, as I had intended to do before the dog-cart drove up ; but while I stand back, mother, without noticing me, chatting in her pleasant, genial way, leads the stranger from the room, and I hear their steps upon the stairs a minute or two afterwards.

Father only laughs when I ask him why he did not drive up to the front door with this strange gentleman, that we might have seen them coming, and been prepared.

‘Charlie prefers the side entrance,’ he says, pinching my cheek, ‘and Mr. Standish did not insist on any other. We need not have sent the cart for the luggage,’ he goes on, while I put away my apron, and we enter the parlour together, ‘for there is very little. I wonder what Mr. Standish means to do with himself for two whole months. Tell Deborah to ring the dinner-bell as soon as you like.’

I think father does this to show Mr. Standish that there is no ceremony at the farm, and that we only waited dinner for their arrival ; and I think Mr. Standish understands, for he comes down grumbling at not being allowed time to wash his hands in comfort—yes, actually grumbling, in this first introduction, yet grumbling with such merriment that it puts us all at our ease at once, and makes us forget we are meeting for the first time. The stiffness and formality that I feared do not once touch us. It is just one of our usual merry chatty meals, except that there seems a freshness about it that makes me wonderfully astonished afterwards, when I find how long we have sat round the table.

Father rises and compares his watch with the timepiece, as if he thought the little clock had overtaken time, and we laugh at him, while Mr. Standish asks me whether our clock always scampers on at that rate. Not as a rule, I tell him, only on exceptional occasions. It is so easy to answer him or talk to him. Oh, how I wish it were as easy to prevent that burning in my cheeks, because it shows him so plainly that I am not used to talking in the way he makes me talk ! Yet what way is it ? I cannot tell. He seems to touch everything fearlessly, daintily, easily ; and somehow he gives into my thoughts much that he does not say, or even make me say, only suggests. And in its newness this is very pleasant to me.

He praises our scenery only a little, but I see already, I think, that he uses few words when he is pleased. Besides, of course he has seen but little of our country yet. One thing seems to have struck him—the beauty of that cottage on the hill where old Lord Rane lived many years. He says it is the very picture and realization of a sweet and peaceful home, and indeed, if he thought so just looking up at it as he drove through the valley, how much more will he think it so when he sees the matchless view from its windows and its fairy gardens ? I almost feel a little jealous for our dear old farm when I hear him praising this empty cottage, but I need not, for when he has been to his rooms

to unpack, and comes into the parlour again, I see him stand at the open window, looking out with perfect content, and seeming to draw in thirsty breaths of our sweet air.

I look at him now more than I could during dinner, yet the same thing baffles me. Just as I feel I know his face exactly, some utterly new expression breaks upon it and changes it. I never saw this in any face before—never; and somehow it seems to make a strange wide difference between ourselves and him yet a difference I cannot define. He stands quite upright at the window now, while Tom leans a little, opposite him; yet the real ease is in his figure, not Tom's; and altogether, in face and form and dress, there is a sort of harmony that is pleasant to look upon—like that dear old familiar scene at which he is gazing.

Now and then, when his face is quite at rest, I see a tired, almost a worn, look upon it, which proves how truly he needs 'mental rest;' but no sooner do I catch a glimpse of it than it vanishes at his first words. I think he is handsome, yet he is like no one I have ever seen who has been called handsome, and certainly like no picture I have ever seen of a really handsome man. His mouth is stern, and his chin large—he has no moustache or beard to hide either—but his eyes are splendid, none the less so for that quick frown between his eyebrows which comes often and clears so magically in his ready laugh. No, I have never before seen a face at all like this, and I am afraid that has really made me 'stare,' as Tom tells me I have, when I go out to make the tea and he follows me.

'Did I really, Tom? Oh, why didn't you make a sign to stop me?'

'You were a hundred miles beyond the reach of signs,' he answers, linking his arm in mine, and taking me to the porch instead of to the kitchen. 'If your eyes were not as round and big as saucers, I should not mind; but, as it is, the family reputation has suffered. Poor Mr. Standish thinks you are not quite responsible for your actions. I saw him glancing at you with compassion when you seemed exceptionally irresponsible.'

'What do you think of him, Tom?'

Tom will not tell me; no, though I beg him so earnestly that the bell rings for tea before I have remembered to make it. I never recollect Tom teasing me quite so persistently before. I try to show him a little offended dignity when I go back into the parlour, but he does not mind at all. He is talking to Mr. Standish; and I notice how ruddy Mr. Standish makes him look, and how young too, though Tom is nearly twenty-five.

While we are at tea, Mr. Standish turns to me rather suddenly, and asks me if I will show him our gardens. I nod willingly—I am too much engrossed in my task to speak, because father likes his tea very sweet, and mother likes very little sugar, and Tom takes none, and Mr. Standish, I find, takes no milk, so that

the pouring out requires my closest attention—but all the same I am a little surprised by the request, because Mr. Standish has not once, I think, spoken directly to myself before. But when tea is over, and I have tied on my old woodland hat, and stand waiting in the porch for him, I find that he has asked mother too to come. So I—feeling how natural it is that he should prefer mother's company to mine—slip behind, and link my arm through father's, making him come too.

What an exquisite night it is ! No wonder we are so unwilling to come in again. No wonder that even this stranger pauses so long in the dear old porch, with that dreamy gaze upon the moonlit valley.

### HIS STORY.

August 3rd.

‘Change of air and consummate mental idleness.’

These were the blessings I was to seek in Devonshire ; and though I have found the first indeed, and revel in it, I begin to fancy the second is impossible to me even here. Yet I do not know why I should say ‘even here.’ I might rather say is doubly impossible to me here, where, strange to say, every hour seems to give birth to a new sensation. Yet born of what ?

In this simple, punctual, unruffled household one would imagine consummate mental idleness would grow apace, flinging everywhere its little shoots and tendrils, called, as you choose, weariness, boredom, or despair. I look for them. I even feel for them, as if they were clinging about me, springing from the idle hours I have already spent. But I look and feel in vain. Not one of these exhaustive, sickly parasite shoots in this healthy atmosphere, and I must be content with change of thought as well as change of air, for consummate mental idleness I cannot win.

I may own now that I had keenly dreaded two months of irrepressible *ennui*, and had anticipated chafing, through every hour of the day, against my enforced isolation. But now, I must confess, that through the past forty-eight hours no one single feeling has been farther from my mind than that. Positively I had almost begun, on this second night, to regret the closing of another day. It is too absurd to bear recording. Still, of course, I must chronicle my advent here—which, by the way, might just as well have been done on the night I came. I wonder why it was not. I remember that I sat up long enough, here in the old-fashioned window-seat. Well, I suppose I was trying after that consummate mental idleness which I had come on purpose to win. I suppose I was trying for it next morning too, when I rose in the early dawn, and threw my window wide to take ‘a

living glory-bath of light and air.' What a treat it was; and through such hours I have for years been sleeping!

I fancied, as Mr. Lee drove me here from Exeter, that I had chanced upon the most beautiful part of Devonshire; but when we reached what he called the Golden Valley—which in reality forms a gradual ascent to this picturesque old farm of Homer Hill—I felt indeed quite sure of it. A man has fair excuse for being proud, as well as fond, of such a home as this; and so I could understand that unconscious inflection of the farmer's voice when he pointed it out to me. But—much as I had been already prepossessed in his favour—I was scarcely prepared for the welcome that he gave me when we reached here; it was so gentlemanly, as well as genial—so perfectly without assumption, and yet so evidently uttered by the man in authority. It was a simple, manly welcome, without one false note in it. We had not driven to the front entrance, as I found afterwards, and yet the bright and restful look of the house struck me in a moment and I smiled to myself, recollecting one or two things which I had been schooling myself to be prepared for in my first experience of a farm. Mr. Lee may be the typical farmer, out among his men, exercising despotically his lordship of the soil—of course I cannot say—but here in his home he is gentle and indulgent, talking not overmuch, but always shrewdly and to the purpose; deferential, in an easy, unconscious way, to his wife; even brotherly with his son; and to his daughter—well, if she be wilful, or perverse, or even vain, she has almost a fair excuse in her father's doting, blind affection!

*If*—what a word it is, with its limitless perspective!

His son is like him—honourable, frank, and intelligent; pleasant to look upon too, and with an easy, unselfish disposition, which is a higher guide than any canon of good form; pleasant even to listen to, for the ordinary modern education has still the gloss upon it of a fresh, unsullied nature.

Let me see. Next comes Mrs. Lee, as bright and cheery as the sunshine of an October day; one of those sweet, warm hearts whose influence is felt widely, directly, yet indefinitely as only warmth and sunshine can be. She is pretty still; but she is more than that. She looks the very poetry of what she really is—the wife and mother. I remember, she recalled to me at once Clough's lines—

'Pretty is all very pretty—it is prettier far to be useful;

Any way, beautiful only to be the thing one is meant for.'

Beautiful she is indeed in her household, being so exactly and so perfectly what she was 'meant for.' Sometimes I think her daughter is very like her; next minute I see a wide dissimilarity, and I can scarcely fancy the daughter living the mother's life. Yet what so natural, or even—in the sense of the word as I have just



used it—so beautiful? In the sweet freshness of the morning, I suppose we seldom can even imagine the evening calm.

I feel as if I had tried once or twice before to describe this girl—or has it been only in my thoughts, as I have stood at my window here, seeing her among the trees and flowers? But even in my thoughts no words seem quite to fit her. Piquant as her prettiness is, I hate to use that word which might describe an ingenious ball-room belle, and I cannot apply to this girlish face, with its wonderful look of purity, any of those terms of praise which have grown so horribly familiar to me in —

Thisbe! The quaint and pretty name crowns fitly the dainty, graceful girl whom Moore might indeed have pronounced ‘rich in all woman’s loveliness.’ What could even he—the universal lover of women—have said more than that, even if he had sat here, as I am doing, and tried to describe the young changing face, with the delicate brows, pure soft skin, fresh sweet smile, lovely, happy eyes, and those merry gentle lips that could indeed ‘persuade without a word’? What could even he—master as he was in the art of flattery—have said, except that Nature has been very good to this farmer’s daughter?

Yet she is not beautiful, in the strict acceptance of the term. I have known too well and too long the laws of female beauty to be mistaken even here. The bright young face would not stand the test, and yet, I think, never before in all my thirty years has any face—or the nature looking through the face—had this haunting effect upon me. Haunting me, too, come back a few words which the very first sight of it brought so involuntarily to my mind—‘Unspotted from the world.’

## HER STORY

August 14th.

It has always been one of our summer pleasures to carry tea to the waterfall, and drink it there in picnic fashion; but I never remember to have enjoyed any gipsy tea so perfectly as this one to-day.

Just at first this morning, when mother proposed it so unexpectedly, thinking only of the beauty of the day, I was afraid; remembering how different Mr. Standish is from us; from Tom and me, or David, or Carrie Briton, who have been accustomed to this sort of thing. But that fear soon died, and I think of all our little party it is the London gentleman who most revels in the delicious August sunshine here to-day, and most relishes our merry and impromptu meal. This makes me wonder, for the hundredth time, if anything here has ever really been quite *new* to him. I have felt beforehand that it must be so, and father has said, ‘That will be a new experience for Mr. Standish,’ yet nothing ever seems new to him when it comes.

He joins so easily in everything, and his part in it seems so natural a one—though it is always the most prominent—that it is often hard to realize that we ever had quite these same pleasures without him, or that they can ever be the same when his place is empty once again—just as hard as to fancy him in any way constrained or not perfectly at home and at his ease. What is this power he has of, as it were, fitting everything? But I may wonder through many a day and night, and nothing can answer me in these short two months. As father said, when I found out that he too shared this wonder of mine, ‘He has lived a wide life somewhere, little Thisbe. Don’t you try to reach it.’

What a beautiful afternoon we are having! Mrs. Briton and mother look like a double portrait of content, as they sip their tea, ensconced in a sort of throne of rock among the turf, above the little waterfall. Father could not come to-day; but Tom lies lazily upon his back, on the smoothest spot of all, his hands under his head, and his merry eyes turned from their quizzing. He says his work is over now, and his rest is earned. I suppose Carrie thinks so too, for she goes presently and sits beside him, bearing a fourth cup of tea for him, and a third for herself. I *seem* to be presiding over the tea, and to be helping everyone, yet somehow I do less than I ever did before at one of our gipsy teas, for everything is done for me by Mr. Standish, while I only seem to do it. So that while I chat and laugh I am fancying myself of use; and David is—just as David always is—kinder to me than any words can say. Once this evening we came rather suddenly upon him at the well, where Mr. Standish came to fill a kettle for me, and I never saw him looking so sad in all my life, though he smiled and spoke a moment afterwards. When he was gone, Mr. Standish looked down into my face gravely—so gravely that no wonder I laughed when the funny little question followed—

‘Is his name Pyramus?’

But tea has long been over now; and our fire under the scaur is dying. We have had a merry talk together, then have watched the sunset, talking very little. Now Deborah has been with one of the men, to fetch the baskets in, and we are going.

The spot is so near home, and we are so likely to come again soon—and again, and again, if we choose—that it is very silly of me to linger still, as if I could not bear to leave it. Happy as this evening has been, there are surely as happy ones still to come.

‘Some day,’ Mr. Standish says, when he and I pause to look down the Golden Valley, ‘I want you to take me to that pretty house on the hill—the Rookery, your father called it. Is it vacant now?’

‘Yes; old Lord Rane lived there many years. Now his heir

wishes to sell it. It is very beautiful there, Mr. Standish; and the cottage itself is quite a gentleman's house, however small.'

'I saw that at once,' he answers, speaking more slowly and thoughtfully than he usually does. 'What a calm, untroubled life one might fancy a man living there! Ah, who is here?'

I can scarcely believe it at first, because I have so little expected Edith Karne's return just yet; but I run forward to give her my welcome back.

'Well, Thisbe,' she inquires, when I have taken her up to my room, to leave her hat and brush her hair, and she holds me by both hands and seats herself upon my bed, 'and so that is Mr. Standish, is it? What a remarkable-looking man!'

'How?' I ask, laughing down at her, as she holds me standing at her side.

'How? Why, in every way! Even a country mouse like you must see it. How different he looks from all of you—of us, I mean!'

'Is he so very handsome?' I ask, trying for the first time to go back to my first impression of him.

'Handsome? N-o-o, not exactly; but he has wonderful eyes, and something in his face that—that makes one stare at it. Why are you colouring so?'

I shake my head, smiling, for I will not tell Edith how rudely I stared at Mr. Standish on his first arrival. He has grown so like an old friend now, that I had forgotten that unfortunate misdemeanour of mine until Edith's words recalled it.

'How soon you criticise anyone's face, Edith! You spoke scarcely half a dozen words to him before we came up. Come, it is not polite of me to leave Carrie Briton.'

'Pooh! Carrie never frets for you; and, as for criticising Mr. Standish's face, why, it is so intensely peculiar, I'll defy a nun to help talking of it! I have been so taken by surprise too. I thought it was an invalid who was coming to you, Thisbe. What is he?'

'A gentleman. Come.'

'Don't try to look proud, Thisbe; it does not suit you. I will soon find out what you cannot—I mean, won't—tell me. Is he engaged?'

'Edith, how can I possibly know?'

'By his letters, of course. Has he many?'

'Yes.'

'In female writing?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't you know whether there are many letters in one lady's hand?'

I laugh out unrestrainedly now; I really cannot help it.

'I never noticed, Edith. I forgot you would want to know.'

'You are no true daughter of our mother Eve,' remarks Edith,

rising and going to the glass. 'I'm disappointed in you, Thisbe. How long does this London gentleman stay here?'

'He came for two months, August and September.'

'And August is nearly over already. I must take down my hair. Chat to me while I do it. What a dear little room this is of yours!'

'I wish you were staying here, Edith,' I answer, grieved to hear that mournful note in her voice. 'You will come over as often as you can, won't you?'

'Yes; I always do get out of the Ecclesiastical Court as quickly as I can.'

'Hush, Edith! You forget yourself when you speak so of the rectory.'

'No; the fault is the other way, child. I *remember* myself when I speak so of the rectory. How delighted David looked to-night when you gave him that spray of heather!'

'I gave one to everybody,' I say, wondering why Edith seems to have dragged in that remark. 'I gathered it on purpose on my way home.'

'But only David had the blush.'

It is of no use contradicting Edith; and to my great surprise—for it is not like her—she never ceases joking me of David, until she has put her hair up prettily and is ready to go down.

Then I ask her very quietly the question which I fancy she has come to-night on purpose to answer.

'Edith, did you accept that gentleman in Boulogne?'

She shakes my hand from her arm, and there comes a strange, angry look upon her face which changes it entirely.

'What childish nonsense!' she says, laughing as I have never heard her laugh before. 'Is a woman to accept every offer she receives? You don't understand these things. If you ever have to break a man's heart, you won't like to be questioned about it afterwards.'

And I should not. So I say no other word to Edith, only link my arm in hers as we go downstairs together, just to show her that I understand ever so little of what such a regret would be. I leave Edith at the door of the front parlour, where they are all sitting, and I go on to the kitchen just to see if there is anything for which I am wanted about supper. But mother, in her great thoughtfulness, has arranged all this to spare me, and so I know we can have some music before Deborah is ready to ring the bell.

They are preparing for music when I go back into the parlour, Edith and Mr. Standish being together at the piano.

'We are waiting for you,' he says, in his clear, distinct way.

'We want you to play,' Edith adds, turning her back to the piano, and looking steadily at me.

But, as she knows, I cannot play fit to be heard; so Mr.

Standish chooses me a song instead, and most kindly sits down and plays the accompaniment for me. It is an old Scotch song, a favourite of father's, and I daresay no one else in the room will care to hear it. Yet, if they ever can, surely they will to-night, when Mr. Standish plays it so well, and makes so much more of it than I can ever do. It is he who presently persuades Edith to play, and then walks away from the piano himself, and stands at the open window. I feel as if I knew quite well how he must be enjoying her music, for she is quite a wonderful player, and of course in the country among us such music is very rare. She plays piece after piece, knowing what a treat she is giving us, and everyone sits mute to listen. The first break in the quietness is made by Mrs. Briton beckoning me to her side with a whispered question. Then I am close to Mr. Standish, and he arrests me coolly.

'Is the mother of Pyramus grieving over his abstracted air?'

'Who is she?'

'Badly feigned, Miss Thisbe. Wasted on you is that delicate suggestion of the mulberry-coloured ribbon in her cap.'

'Does not Miss Karne play well?' I ask; for somehow, while he speaks, he has drawn back a little, and we stand half in and half out of the low, open window.

'Magnificently,' he answers, with great readiness. 'I feel rapt and enchained, as Christopher Sly did over the comedy. "Tis an excellent piece of work—would 'twere done!'"

Then, in my great stupidity, I question him on what has often amused us.

'Mr. Standish, you can always quote something that fits in. How much you must have learned!'

'Nothing,' he laughs, but the laugh is very quiet. 'Things commit themselves to my memory, but I am not even conscious of their having done so until they become a part of my—immortality. What are you wondering over, my child?'

I am wondering over his last few words, but I cannot tell him so. I only make a useless remark to fill in the gap.

'You must very much miss your books now, Mr. Standish,'—for it has surprised us all that he brought none with him.

'Do I look such a formidable reader? Is that what your eyes are saying? No, I don't miss my books. I miss nothing. I left everything behind me because, like King Harold, I was "sick for an idle week."'

'Harold's words this time,' I just say, quietly, and will not look at him, because he would make me smile, or even laugh, perhaps, and that would be terrible while Edith plays.

'What an incorrigible duffer I am!' he says, shaking his hair from his forehead, where the frown has gathered, though his voice is full of fun. 'Anyone would fancy I had been all my life studying how to fit other men's words to my own ideas, or—'

the reverse. I thought last Sunday how absurd it was to hear Mr. Karne quoting Shakespeare from the pulpit. How it jangled out of tune !'

I tell him demurely that I do not think even he could have found a more apt quotation than Mr. Karne's.

'No,' he laughs, 'nor have been more able

"To pluck the eyes of sentiment, and dock the tail of rhyme,  
To crack the voice of melody, and break the legs of time."

What a blessing that supper-bell is, for you will have no time to say what you think about my quotations, unless—— Will you ?

But I know, of course, that I am the last in all the room to take the arm he offers me ; so David and I go in together, as we have so often and often done before ; and it seems to me just one of our usually long merry suppers. But David makes me a little uncomfortable once or twice by whispering to me that Mr. Standish must be accustomed to brilliant society, and that his coming here is 'very strange.'

I think it is. It often seems so to me ; yet somehow it makes my head ache a little when David says it.

It is a beautiful moonlit night, and we all go out into the garden with our visitors when they are leaving us. I so often walk with Tom to the rectory, when he takes Edith home, that I quite naturally prepare to do so to-night ; but something Edith says to Mr. Standish stops me.

'I shall walk alone. I know the way too well to be afraid, and I would not for the world deprive Miss Briton of Tom's society.'

I do not wait to hear Mr. Standish's answer ; but a few minutes afterwards he and Edith go off together, while Tom and I saunter up the lane with Carrie Briton, and then wait till the phaeton reaches us and she gets in. Of course, as we stroll slowly home again, I do not tell Tom what Edith had said about depriving Carrie of his company. She must have forgotten that Carrie would drive with her mother. And Edith will amuse Mr. Standish—she has seen so much, and knows his sort of world.

'Mr. Standish has not been long away,' Tom says, as he opens the garden gate for me. 'There he is smoking on the lawn. You are all right now, dear, and I want to go round to the yard a minute.'

I try to pass Mr. Standish unobserved, though I am sure I cannot tell why. But he either sees or hears me at once, throwing his cigar over the far hedge, just where it will fall among the celery.

'You have been a long time,' he says, in a grave sort of calculating way. 'Did you find it so hard to lure your brother from the sister of Pyramus ?'

'Please don't talk so of Miss Briton. She is the nicest girl you could possibly know.'

'Then what about Miss Karne?'

'Oh, she is—pretty, isn't she?'

'I daresay. Describe her to me, that I may know.'

'You saw her.'

'No; I saw but one girl all this evening.'

'How well you talk with invisible beings, then, Mr. Standish!'

I say, stooping to improve the tying of one of my carnation props. 'Was the rector invisible too?'

'He was visible in the garden, placidly digesting his dinner. I saw his white neck-cloth with its "straitened tie; The sober hat, the Sabbath-speaking eye."'

'Edith is not very happy at the rectory.'

'Is she happy anywhere?'

'She likes going about,' I say, deprecating this idea of his.

'She knows London quite well.'

'And you do not, do you?' he asks me, laughing at my tone; and then, just as politely as if he had not heard me before, he makes me tell him what I hope to see. I know what a jumble it must seem to him, because at last he gives me his own version of what he has gleaned from me.

'You want to hear Patti—and you will be far too late; to see the picture-galleries—and they will all be closed; to hear the Guards' band—and you will never get up in the morning in time; to stroll in the Parks—and they will be empty as a desert; to see the Tower—and the crowd will not let you see it; to hear *Romeo and Juliet*, with Muller as Romeo—and he will by that time have left town. Poor child! I would stay in this sweet Devonshire valley.'

'You see, Mr. Standish,' I urge, timidly, 'you cannot judge for me, because you are tired of what you call to-day, the noise of those great wheels of the world's machinery; but you would understand, if you would go back and remember how it was before you had ever heard them.'

Then he is suddenly and strangely silent; and I wonder so sadly whether I can have touched a time it pains him to recall, or whether he is simply tired of me.

## HIS STORY.

August 26th.

'What is it?'

I seem for ever asking myself vaguely that question, so perhaps, if I write it now, it will haunt me less. Is it really so? Have I given all my heart to this simple country girl, whose eyes have looked on nothing low or base, whose lips are pure as the sky above her own green hills, whose heart knows nothing of what passion means? I, for whom life has been so wide and

deep, and in whose world her world would show but as a speck upon a globe ! I !

But I myself am changed. How little I thought, when I came here to seek utter idleness from thought, that for my thoughts there never could be utter idleness again ! How little I dreamed, when they told me that I should be bored to death here, with no ambition to gratify, that I should work harder than I have ever worked before, in my ambition to be homely and simple ; and that my highest aim would be to win a primitive little home among the Devonshire hills, and a wife ! No it would not do !

Yet what a charm she has, herself so utterly unconscious of it ! If her face is to haunt me in this way, day and night, the sooner I leave it the better—if I can. Yet would it not haunt me in whatever life I live ? Is it not too late now ever to shut it from my heart ? Pooh ! I'll go up to town, and break this ridiculous infatuation. What a laugh they would have against me if they knew ! I, who have been thought so exacting, and so hard to satisfy, so keen and strict a critic, am enthralled by every trifling act and every word of a girl in her teens ! I, who have laughed at woman's love as a fable, have staked my whole life's happiness on just one word from a slip of a girl ! Absurd indeed ! I will go up to town to-morrow.

How clearly and prettily she talks, and how hungry she is to read ! I am glad I brought no books, I should be jealous of them while she read ; and I read none, for she is the sweetest book to me. Sometimes she talks of that London world which she has never seen, and even then I feel as if I could listen for ever—only longing to hold her safely here, that she might never join that world I know so well. Yet how could it hurt her ? She would be there what she is here. I shall write presently to Lord Rane about the Rookery. What a home it might be ! And now I can fancy my heart's desire— All this is nonsense of course. I must be in town early in November ; so, even if I wished it, I could not extend my stay here very late. But I will run up to-morrow for a change. I think I need a change now more than I did when I came. I was not haunted then by one face and form and voice.

## HER STORY.

August 31st.

Mr. Standish has been away for a few days, and we have missed him much—so much that it seems strange to me, when I remember that we are all at home, the little group among whom I used to dread a stranger coming. Edith Karne comes



nearly every day to spend a few hours with us, for she says the farm is more like home to her than the rectory.

Tom tells her, in the coolest manner, that it is her fault the rectory is dull to her. He is telling her so (but I am too busy to listen, trying to finish a task of mother's before she comes in), when Mr. Standish enters, just as coolly as if he had never left the house. Yet I fancy, when he first comes in, that he looks anxiously at me, in a steady way, almost as a stranger might look.

'I felt quite sure you would return for to-morrow's shooting, Mr. Standish,' Tom says. 'You did not say you would; so I suppose you were afraid the business that took you to London might keep you?'

'Is it finished now?' I question, rather shyly.

'No; it is not.'

'No?'

I think it is Edith who echoes the word in such astonishment.

'No! What I went to do I find impossible. So my journey and my time have been wasted utterly.'

'You enjoyed yourself though, I feel sure, Mr. Standish,' Edith says, seeming to settle herself for a long conversation, while I slip away to order dinner for Mr. Standish, with our tea.

When I come back, she seems to be much interested; while Mr. Standish sits opposite her, on a low chair, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin in his hands.

'I'm confident you are not accustomed to living in the country, Mr. Standish,' Edith is saying, a smile on her lips, and her hands lying idle.

'No.'

'Yet you would not look so well and so strong, I think, if you spent your days in a London office.'

'I dare say not, Miss Karne,' he answers, easily.

But my cheeks grow very warm, for she has no right to question him here; and he looks at me all the time, so that I feel I ought to stop her questioning.

'I thought one day,' Edith goes on, 'when I heard you advising Mr. Lee what to say to his lawyers, that you were very clever in law. Have you studied it?'

'A little.'

'Not enough to practise?' she asks, in a tone of disappointment, as if she had come to a stumbling-block.

'Not enough to practise for anybody's benefit.'

'Do you know what I have heard one or two people say,' she goes on, after a moment's pause, and with another smile; 'that it is plain by your walk and your bearing, that you have been in the Army? Have you been a soldier, Mr. Standish?'

'Yes.'

'But are not now?'

'No.'

Edith's colour deepens a little; she is getting provoked as well as puzzled. As for me, I would like to go away, but I want to finish all the preserve labels before mother comes in.

'Do you remember,' Edith persists, almost without a pause, 'taking me home one night, and listening to all my aunt's complaints about her medicine? Well, do you know she told me, after you were gone, that she felt sure you must be a physician.'

'I have been.'

If I were not so vexed by Edith's useless curiosity, I am sure I should laugh, though I still write on; yet through it all I hear no sound of laughter in Mr. Standish's voice.

'Is it possible?' Edith cries, and looks rather blankly at him.

'But is that all, Miss Karne? Has not your uncle, the worthy rector, told you, after one of my talks with him, that I was beyond doubt a clergyman?'

'He did say it! He did indeed,' laughs Edith. 'How clever of you to guess! And have you really been a clergyman?'

'Yes; and really worn the "straitened tie and sober hat."'

'You seem,' Edith ponders, 'to have tried everything.'

'Not quite,' he answers, rising and coming to quiz my labels. 'I have not tried thimble-rigging yet. Now, Miss Thisbe, I will finish those. Did *you* expect me home so soon?'

It seems strange just for that first moment to hear him speak of the farm as home; but I am very glad, as he has still a month to stay with us.

'I think,' remarks Edith, from her seat at the window, while she watches him, 'that you are thinner for your London week, Mr. Standish.'

'No wonder,' he answers, briefly.

Tom comes in again then, and I hear Mr. Standish ask him how he is to address to Lord Rane, because he is going to write at once and ask for the Rookery. How strange it will seem to have him for a neighbour, within five miles of us! I can scarcely fancy it. But of course—as Edith says, when she goes upstairs with me to put her hat on—he will come down to Devonshire only once a year, just for a little shooting, and then he will have the Rookery full, and not come over here. Naturally it would be so.

'Even yet, Thisbe, you see,' Edith says, looking around, to be quite sure we are alone, 'I have not found out his profession.'

'Why did you try?'

'Because I want to know. I've found one thing though, and that is that he has a bullet-wound somewhere, and it makes him wince. I don't like such reserve, Thisbe. It looks bad.'

'I don't see any manner of reserve about Mr. Standish,' I maintain, pausing with my hand on the door.

'I don't say,' Edith acknowledges, 'that it affects his manner—he is debonair enough—but then you must remember he is having his own way here entirely. He reminds me of the wind that came up out of the sea, and said, "Oh! mists, make room for me!" I can fancy him in a tearing rage if the mists did not make room.'

September 4th.

Father has friends shooting with him, so we are not to dine till eight. David is among them, so Carrie will be here to meet him, and our rector and his wife come to-day for one of their periodical visits—their formal visits, I was going to say, but I think nothing here is grand enough for there ever to be any formality. Edith is here already, though it is not yet four o'clock; but she assures me, as she sits watching me bleaching almonds, that she is paying me only a call now, and is going home again to come ceremoniously with her uncle and aunt. She offers to help in my countless little preparations; but when her help is offered, and she questions me, and waits for my orders, there seems nothing for her to do.

'Is Mr. Standish shooting with the others?' Edith asks, sitting on the kitchen-table, and swinging her feet.

'Not to-day. He had an idle fit, and said his fishing was so nearly over that he would fish to-day.'

'Where?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't know?' laughed Edith. 'How convenient—until you want him!'

'Thisbe,' calls Tom, coming in just then—for, though he could not be spared to shoot this morning, he is evidently at liberty now—'are you busy? Because if not—and you are willing, Edith—let us take tea by the river. Mr. Standish is at the bend, and it is such a lovely afternoon! Come, there are four good hours before dinner.'

'Capital!' cries mother from the farther table, where she is filling the custard glasses. 'I was just wanting an hour's fresh air for Thisbe. Now, Edith, if you will help in earnest for ten minutes, she will be free. Deborah will put up the tea. Ask Sarah for a new cake, Deborah, and go to the dairy for a jar of cream. That's right, Edith; I like to see you running about.'

Mother's cheery words hurry us all; and she seems so delighted for us to have this pleasure that it is doubly a pleasure; and in less than half an hour all my little tasks are finished, the basket packed, and on Tom's shoulder, and we have started merrily, with many a backward glance and smile for mother, as she waits in the porch.

Mr. Standish springs up in astonishment when he catches

sight of us ; and we can all see how delighted, as well as astonished, he is by this break in his day's sport.

'It proves,' says Tom, with a laugh, 'that he was not born an Izaak Walton.' But Edith says that it proves far more clearly that he has only been day-dreaming by the river, and that she detected that plainly before he turned and saw us at that——

'Unhappy moment,' adds Mr. Standish, drily.

'Mr. Standish,' Edith says, when our kettle is singing merrily, and I am just standing idly resting, looking down the river, 'Thisbe looks as if she considered fishing a cruel sport, doesn't she?'

'She does indeed. I know exactly how she feels.

    'When I behold a butcher with horn-handled knife  
    Slaying a tender lamb as dead as mutton—  
    Indeed, indeed, I'm very, very sick!''

It is of no use—I am obliged to turn round in speechless wonder, while Tom and Edith stand staring too. Yet it is impossible to tell why the few ridiculous words should have struck us so.

'I have read or heard those lines a hundred times,' Tom says, pondering. 'Yet they sounded new to me. I have never heard anyone read or quote as you do, Mr. Standish.'

'I can do this better,' he answers, building up the fire.

'You can do everything, I think,' Edith says.

'No ; there is one thing I cannot manage.'

'Really ? What can it be ?'

'I cannot smell a rose, but prick my nose against the thorn !'

'But, Mr. Standish,' I put in, for I know this time what he quotes, 'you can always take the consolation, you can always "rail against the rose" !'

'No,' he answers, with a laugh, but a great brightness in his eyes, 'that is still more impossible with me.'

Our funny little picnic is over, when Edith, after a few minutes' unusual silence, makes a suggestion that rather astounds us all, especially as she makes it to Tom, only glancing at Mr. Standish.

'I have been wondering whether we could act a charade to-night. We shall be plenty both for audience and actors. It could not help being a success with Mr. Standish in it.'

'Impossible,' he says, answering for Tom with a brief, quick laugh, and still with an unusual light in his wonderful eyes.

'Oh, don't say impossible !' she cries, warming to her cause. 'It would be such a treat for us quiet country people. Could you refuse us ? You could choose your staff. Tom would be sure to do it well, so would David Briton.'

'Pyramus would be sure to do it well, would he ?' Mr. Standish asks, very slowly, and with a comically steadfast gaze at me.

'Do promise, Mr. Standish,' she pleads, thinking he gives in.

‘Just think ! Thisbe has never seen acting of any sort, except our nonsense as children. She has never seen a play at all. Won’t you help to initiate her, if only in compassion ?’

‘No. Indeed, no !’ he answers, with so much determination in his tone that I wonder over it, knowing now that it would be of no use to entreat him any more.

‘They would, of course, be only improvised, and no one would expect perfection from us,’ insists Edith, never attempting to relinquish her idea, though now we have reached the gate where she has to turn aside for the rectory.

But still there is no sign of Mr. Standish relenting.

‘Oh, Mr. Standish,’ Edith says, turning back after she has passed the gate, ‘I quite forgot to tell you ! Uncle has a friend with him to-day who knows you. He is coming with us to Homer Hill this evening.’

It is a mistake of mine, of course. It cannot be that the strong handsome face has grown white and stiff all in a minute. It is impossible, and yet I never imagined this before ; and— and Tom is looking as curiously as I am at Mr. Standish. The silence has lasted but a few seconds, and now he is saying something to Edith, so lightly, even excitedly, that she fancies he has changed his mind as well as manner, and once more pleads for a charade under his management. But when he refuses now his refusal is altogether different. His face is white and hurt, but full of resolution now, stern and immovable ; and even Edith sees this new look and drops her entreaty.

Mr. Standish is very silent all the way home, and Tom and I are silent too, I do not know why, unless it is because he influences us so much, even unconsciously. Indeed, for the first time since he has been with us I am glad for us to separate in the porch, and go to our rooms.

Of course mother and I are down before any one arrives except Carrie Briton. But very soon father comes in with his friends, then come Tom and David, and—last and rather late—Mr. and Mrs. Karne and Edith, with a quiet, middle-aged gentleman. We are all here except Mr. Standish.

Mother, in despair, is just asking Tom in a whisper if he had not better go and hasten him, when he comes in, and I see in a moment that there is still that strange change in him. He looks proud and quiet, as he has never looked before—stern and distant even. He goes up to those he knows among our guests, and father brings the strangers to him, to introduce in our old-fashioned way ; but his back seems turned upon the rectory party, and so he does not see how curiously the rector’s friend is scanning him from behind his glasses. I can see that Edith is waiting to attract his attention, yet hesitating, because she, like myself, is struck by the strangeness in both his manner and his face. But, when she finds we have waited only for Mr. Stan-

dish, and are going in to dinner now, she makes a step forward and touches him.

'Mr. Standish, I suppose my uncle's friend scarcely needs an introduction to you, but, if you forget, allow me—Mr. Singer.'

Mr. Standish bows in a stiff, ceremonious way, which seems to sit unnaturally upon him. Then the old gentleman speaks out, pushing his glasses high on his forehead.

'Pardon me, I find I have mistaken. This is not the Mr. Standish I know. I have never had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman before.'

'To me it makes the pleasure greater now,' Mr. Standish says, in just his usual pleasant way, and his face has its old look of ease.

I am just making up my mind not again to wonder over any words and looks of his, when he comes up to my side, and puts my hand on his arm.

'I have permission,' he says, in that resistless way of his. 'Did you guess I was going to leave you to Pyramus? Thisbe, we will have the charade, if you wish it.'

'But you said——'

'Never mind what I said then. Forget the *then*, and remember only the *now*. I must whisper Miss Karne to think of a good word.'

'She will be so surprised,' I say, recalling how unhesitatingly he had refused her request by the river.

We discuss the charade merrily, and I wonder to myself whether the acting can be half so pleasant as this merry planning of it, broken into—as it so constantly is—because we do not talk in couples all through dinner, as Edith says we ought at a dinner-party. Indeed, everybody seems to talk so much to everybody else that Mr. Standish often laughs at the difficulty he has to speak privately to me, or to Edith, who is on his other side; or I to pass his suggestions on to David, who is on my other side.

As soon as ever dinner is over, we young ones escape, taking refuge in the large front kitchen, always a favourite lounging-place with Mr. Standish when it is bright and light and empty, as it is to-night. It is Mr. Standish who hits upon the word. It is Mr. Standish who sketches to us the little story we are to act, and fits a part to each of us. It is Mr. Standish who gives some mysterious touch to the improvised costumes to make them comic or picturesque; and in the easiest and most natural way hints to us how we can make our acts and our speeches touching or laughable. But he denies it flatly when Tom tells him that the praise they give us is due to him alone.

'You were all magnificent,' he says, in his bright way. 'I never in my life enjoyed acting as I have done to-night.'

And I, chancing to meet his eyes just then, can see that he

really means it, though it seems strange indeed to me. I have not been quite so stupid in my parts as I felt sure I should be. It was far more easy to me, and somehow the merry answers seemed to come of their own accord just when I wanted them. And as for acting with Mr. Standish, why, there was simply no trouble at all, because he seemed so exactly the person he represented, that I was literally deceived into feeling with him the person *I* represented. What a new thing it is to me, and how delightful!

I say this to Mr. Standish, when it is all over and we are separating in the hall; but I only say it because he asks me, almost earnestly, whether it is not far wiser to be ourselves always, and to act no part at all.

Even when our last guest has left, I do not feel at all sleepy, but I come to my room and sit at the open window, thinking over this evening. Yet why? It is but in a confused and unconnected way that it comes back to me. I remember our swift, excited racing up and down stairs, our inroads upon mother's wardrobe, and the utter wreck we made of mine. I remember how difficult it was to repress our talk and laughter at the last minute before appearing; and how doubly difficult—for me at least—to keep serious when the laughter of our audience grew so evidently beyond their control. I remember once or twice seeing David almost convulsed behind a door, until Mr. Standish begged me in a whisper to 'infuse a little of my great solemnity into Pyramus.' I wish he would not call David Pyramus to me, even in a whisper. I wish it so very especially to-night, because of what David told me, when Carrie kept him so long, and he and I chanced to be at the gate together. Oh, David, dear old friend, it was so sad to see your face with that new, sorry look upon it! But the old cheeriness will come back soon, I think; because we are almost as like one family as if you and I—How impossible that would be!

So all my memories of this evening are, as I say, jumbled together, and, except my own enjoyment, only one thing is clear to me—how wonderfully well Mr. Standish acted, how easy every part seemed to him, and how undefinably and yet immeasurably he eclipsed every one of us!

But—yes, one thing more I do remember—clearest of all. How strangely and unexpectedly Mr. Standish changed in one of his scenes, and—it seemed with only a few words and one slight gesture—touched us into utter silence, and made a strange lump come into my throat! It is of no use wondering how he could move us so, without the slightest effort. I could never understand; I only know it was so.

## HIS STORY.

September 4th.

To-night I have won Mr. Lee's permission to woo his daughter for my wife. Coming as I did, an utter stranger to his house, I felt this due to him before I allowed a word of love to pass my lips to her. Now I need not guard my lips and eyes as I have done. Now I may strive to make this little maiden comprehend how she has become my heart's desire—my heart's longing and desire. I think I have felt her so from the first minute that I looked upon her sweet, pure face—even before I learnt that, while her thoughts were so fresh and childlike, there was a depth and courage in the tender, untried heart. Now I may tell her of the new hopes which I have found it so hard to conceal, of the one strong, resistless feeling which makes all others dim to me as in a dream.

My love—my fairy love, who has changed the world for me—I need no longer now hold back the words that sometimes rush so passionately to my lips when you are with me!

How her father's voice shook when at last he gave me his consent to tell my darling of my love, only pleading that, if she consents, I will not hurry her away from them all! How could I help feeling keenly for him, even in my own great hope? They all love her so dearly—and what wonder?—that it will be a wrench indeed even if I only take her to that pretty house I have so constantly dreamed of lately, and that is promised to me at last. What a home it will be! Our home—my wife's and mine! What delicious words to write! Whatever countries we may visit, or wherever we may care to stay for a time, there will be the peaceful, beautiful little home to come back to, and always rest and happiness for me in her presence. What will she say to me? It almost seems as if she would start and fly at any words of love, yet she must have heard them, if only from — I will not write his name, poor fellow!

What a treat it was to see her to-night! I never doubted her bright natural genius; but anything so indescribably *glad* as her acting, I never saw. Of course I never saw it, for how could I have seen such fresh, spontaneous acting? How immensely superior was her conception of each part to her friend Miss Karne's, and yet in a conventional way Miss Karne was more correct! And the young men—how ready and intelligent they were! Altogether, what I had dreaded as likely to prove a weariness and depression, made me laugh, in a ridiculously boyish fashion, as I have not laughed for years. But then this summer I have been so unlike myself that nothing more can surprise me.

If that friend of the rector's had really known—but why turn back to look into the face of any dead alarm?



I wish I were not obliged to be away so early in November. Yet how ridiculous to dread a short absence, when only two bare weeks ago I rushed away and tried to live without her ! Tried, and failed utterly ! After that one voluntary exile, when my heart yearned for her through every hour of my absence, and every thought and hope of mine were so closely woven round her that I could not live my life away, can I ever doubt what is my heart's one strong desire ? Come to me, little Thisbe ; and, for the precious, priceless gift, a better life than I have ever lived shall prove my long, undying gratitude.

September 5th.

I knew my darling would pass down the laurel walk and through the lower orchard this morning to feed her guinea-fowls, as she always does, and so I waited there to tell her of my love. Perhaps it was only because I was early myself, in my great anxiety, that she seemed late in coming ; but I had spent nearly two hours strolling to and fro, before I heard her singing as she came into my sight ; as fair and bright a picture as ever artist's eyes could rest upon ; no shadow in the lovely eyes, the fresh lips laughing, it might seem, at any possibility for her of wakeful nights, such as she herself has made me spend.

She had a bunch of hawthorn-berries in her dress, and they seemed like a glimpse of the winter she would make so gloriously beautiful for me ; while in her little basket lay a bunch of the roses whose scent will ever seem to me the very breath of this past happy summer.

I remember that she looked wonderingly up into my face at the first word I spoke to her, as if she read something in my voice, even before my lips had uttered their longing ; and then——

Had I ever guessed that I should tell that story of a man's love which I have often—that I should tell it, without having thought beforehand what I should say, or knowing afterwards what I had said ? But how could I know, when every word came straight from my heart, and it was on *her* words, not mine, that happiness depended ? It was for her answer that I listened, as for life or death, in that sweet summer silence.

And when it came ! My love, my little love, could you ever guess that I, who seemed so strong to you, perhaps, felt like a child in that flood of new delicious happiness, when my heart had won its desire ?

Can I really believe, even yet, that this great blessing has come to me, though every look of her dear happy eyes tells me I am not dreaming still, as I have dreamed so long, and that she too is well content—though timidly and shyly so just yet—to rest within my care and love ? She is going with me to-morrow for

the first time, to that pretty house upon the hill which is to be our home when she will come. I waited only for the promise she gave me to-day, and then I wrote at once to secure it, knowing she would love to live near her old home, and that for them the parting would not be so sad. So we will go together to-morrow, and picture the home that we will make it, and the life that we will live there ; and I shall feel her hand in mine, and look into her eyes, and know that my long dream has reached its blest fulfilment.

Can I help it if to-night all my thoughts rest upon this golden future, when her life will be bound up in mine? Except in silent gratitude for what has come to me at last, I would not touch the past. My thirty years hold much that I would fain forget.

When will they give her to me? Will they keep me long waiting for my treasure? How thankful I should be if I were not obliged to be away so soon, but yet that is a cowardly wish. There are weeks of happiness in store for me before November comes, and I need be absent from my love only just half a dozen days. I should be a churl indeed to resent or chafe at that.

September 6th.

I cannot tell how many hours we spent at the Rookery to-day in idle happiness, talking—I suppose as lovers always will—of the glorious future vaguely stretched before us, and of that wonderful present which flies so fast beneath our feet ; never touching the past, save once, and it was only thus. When we were leaving the little home which, in our imagination, we had filled with warmth, and love, and brightness, I took my darling into my arms for just one minute, and kissed her long and tenderly, while my heart was filled with gratitude, and strong and silent in its new resolves.

But before I let her go, and while she still looked so trustingly into my face, a strange, inexplicable compassion swept over my heart for the man who loved her in vain, and who, I knew without a word from her, had never kissed the sweet fresh lips. I should not have told her this, only that, with a touch upon my hand, she wondered what was my thought.

But, when I told her, she did not laugh as I had felt she would ; she only asked me, innocently and wistfully, if these were not my first kisses also.

My heart felt heavy in that moment, as she stood with such a questioning in her eyes, and my hand went softly down upon the pure, lifted brow. But I suppose she could not read my silence, as she might have done ; for presently she asked the question again, with a little confident smile upon her lips.

‘It depends, my love,’ I said, touching her lips again, as

certainly I had touched no other lips in all my life, 'on what we call kissing.'

'I don't know,' she said, while I felt a little shiver running through her frame; 'nor do I know why I asked you, Jerome'—very shyly still she utters my Christian name.

We left the pretty spot, and sauntered homeward in the autumn sunshine, while my darling laughed and talked and raced with me, and was as happy as I felt. And when we met Mr. Lee, he stroked his daughter's cheek with his brown hand, and told me he knew the name of the best rose-grower in the world.

October 14th.

I think my darling's happiness is almost equal to my own. How beautiful she looked this morning when she asked me why the whole world seemed so much fairer than it used to be! Could I not tell her how to me all Nature whispers in its fullest harmony—'She loves you! She you love is yours!'

Each day we go now to the Rookery for a little, and watch it growing into a perfect home for us. In my great content I feel that 'no grass springs up so fresh, so green, so plentiful as mine.' What a long breath I drew to-night, as we stood looking down upon the Golden Valley—golden indeed in this wonderful October moonlight—and her hand was warm and safe in mine!

'Jerome,' she said, 'you love it so; and yet you will leave it?'

'But not for long, my darling—only for six short days.' Yet, as I spoke I knew that to me they would seem longer than they could to her.

'You are quite obliged to go, Jerome?'

'Quite obliged, my dearest. But not until the sixth; and by the thirteenth I shall be at home again.'

Home again! How eagerly, how gladly I shall return to my heart's desire!

I would not have spoken again to-night of our parting—I always try so hard in her presence to forget it—but Thisbe herself, when we reached the lawn gate at home, turned and leaned against it, looking once more down the moonlit valley, while I looked only at her. And I think that when she spoke at last her words had little to do with the thought that went before.

'I wonder when Edith Karne will come back to Devonshire?'

'Is she still in Boulogne?' I asked, quite glad that my darling had chosen this indifferent subject.

'I think they have left Boulogne now,' Thisbe answered. 'She is to be with her mother and brother for a few weeks longer in London. I wonder when I shall go to London, Jerome? Tom and I were—'

I understood her sudden silence and the soft, bright blush; for Tom had told me only yesterday how it had been planned that

this autumn he should take his sister for her first glimpse of town, but that, of course, he would not carry out that plan, as she was so soon to leave home for good.

'When you go, dear one,' I said, 'it will not be for a hurried journey, such as mine is to be. When I take you time will be our own, I trust; and you shall see London at its best.'

'And is it not London at its best that you are going to see, Jerome?'

I laughed, yet something in her words, or in her eyes, brought to me in that quiet hour a keen and terrible foreboding, which yet I fought against and would not grasp. Why was Fate so unkind as to call me away just now? Why should the old life keep this grip upon me and hold me back, when the new life lay so fair before me? Must even such a motive as I have be strong enough to separate us now, before I have taken my darling to my heart, and told her—

'Jerome,' she said, brightly, and gently breaking my gloomy thought, 'I try to remember that you might be a sailor, and have a long voyage to take before you could—could feel ready to take your own house; or a soldier, and have a still more terrible risk to run. When I think of these things, your few days' absence seems so different—just a blessing, Jerome.'

'If I could only think so,' I answer, brokenly. 'But it seems to me that there is nothing worse. Only one thing comforts me, Thisbe. This separation must be our last. Promise that, my love.'

It was an unnecessary and exacting request, for had she not promised me that on the last day of this good year, I might win my wife? Yet, instead of rebuking me, she laid her gentle hand on mine, and promised once again.

November 5th.

We paid to-day our last visit to the home that is in preparation for us. How ridiculously I wrote that 'last,' when our absence is to be but for six days! An unmanly cowardice is upon me to-day. Could anything in the world cause the dear home and love and hope to slip from me because for a few days my hand cannot clasp my darling's or her voice reach my ear? Foreboding! What is there to forebode? Yet I have tried to reason myself out of this womanish nervousness, and cannot. It is just as if some vague, dim shadow followed me, which vanished when I turned and questioned it, yet, when I went upon my way, was ever there.

It was that which made me for a moment to-day forget all my gratitude for the home that had received me, and the gift that had been given me, and wildly wish it were my *wife* that I was leaving behind me—my wife, bound to me evermore, through

good report or ill. But surely I shall be thankful all my life that I did not tell her of this selfish desire.

'Thisbe,' I said, my voice broken in spite of all my efforts, as we stood in our own future home, watching the solemn twilight deepen on the river and the woods, 'no parting, in its deep and bitter sense, is possible between us two for ever; is it?'

'None!' she said. And, just as my words were troubled and passionate, hers were firm and quiet in their great trustfulness.

'Our betrothal bound us as solemnly in spirit, Thisbe, as our marriage can. Oh, my love, you feel this so?'

'Yes; I have always felt it. Why are you troubled so to-night?'

'And it is such a little time, is it not, my darling, till the last day of this bright year?'

'Yes.'

'And, my wife—ah, let me call you wife just once, while you whisper one dear word to me!'

But I could see now that this new agitation in my manner disturbed her, and so I shook it from me, like the mean feeling that it was, and remembering how I had tried before to leave her, as if it might have been an easy thing, I soothed her, in that grave, protecting way which sometimes makes her smile and ask me where I learned my many moods.

I took her hands in mine, and raised them to my lips, and held them there, as if in this peaceful, shadowy eventime our parting might become but a more solemn, if a sadder, betrothal.

November 6th.

I have taken my last look into my darling's brave, sweet face, as she stood in the porch at the dear old farm and watched me go. I was grateful—sad as they looked—to see tears standing in her bright, undrooping eyes, for my own ached in their yearning, and I felt what a relief the tears might be.

'Only six days!' So I say to myself again and again as the fast train carries me to Scotland. 'Only six days!'

And then I look back six days, to judge of how long a time it is, and smile to find how fleetly they must have passed, for all those six days seem like yesterday. And I try not to listen to the voice reminding me that Thisbe was with me through those days, while through these I shall have but her memory, except that one letter which she will to-morrow send me to Glasgow. But I may write to her. I may write to her each day, and remind her of how quickly that New Year's Eve is coming—I shall believe it while I write, and tell her so, though just now it seems so far away—and that this thought is the sunshine on my way. I have brought a book, and I try to read, that my thoughts may rest a little from my own hopes and fears. But presently

the story, despite its powerful verse, hurts me strangely, and I throw aside the book and try to interest myself in my fellow-travellers and in the country that we pass through. But it is of little use. Everywhere I see my love's sweet face and the wistful questioning of her eyes, while everywhere I see too those haunting words I have so lately read. Only two lines, yet every sound of the bright winter morning echoes them—

‘As I turned, there stood  
In face of me my wife—stone still, stone white.’

What, in such lines, dare touch my darling's name within my heart? What is this horrible oppression upon me? We are rushing through one of the fairest bits of England, and every moment, in this speed of ours, brings nearer that bright hour which reunites us. Why cannot I rise like a man, and shake off this weak and childish fear?

Is there always such a vague shadow of foreboding when lovers part? I knew so little of it. I could not have fancied it would bring this pain and heaviness. But of course it must be always so, and why should this unrest of mine be anything deeper than regret at leaving her I love? I will talk now to any one who will listen to me. I will not open that book again. Why do the words cling to me?

‘As I turned, there stood  
In face of me my wife—stone still, stone white.’

Oh, my love! If we but meet in happiness once more, no parting, and no shadow from the past, shall sever us!

## HER STORY.

November 7th.

Only yesterday he left us, and yet it seems long weeks, busy as I try to be, and anxiously as I try to spend these hours without a murmur. I never dreamed the world would feel so empty just because I miss one voice about the house, and one step. I blame myself for listening for them, and I sing always when I am alone to prevent it.

I should be so very, very sorry if mother could see that I feel the dear home different; and yet I cannot help it. Every minute I turn and think to see his face, with that look of surpassing happiness which it has lately worn; and, when I cannot find it, it is a little hard to me, just all in a minute, to recollect that the lifelong blessing of his love is mine, the very same as if he were

here with me. And I can scarcely even miss his constant care, because everybody is so wonderfully kind to me.

How thoughtfully mother proposed to-day that she and I should walk together to the Rookery, fancying I should miss what has grown into a daily recreation for me ! But father was—unconsciously, perhaps—still kinder, when he said, ‘Leave that journey until Mr. Standish comes home, pet. No fear that grass will grow upon the path in half-a-dozen days ; and then the mother will be there with you too, for she has grand designs upon that linen-press.’

Then father kisses me, and turns away almost in a hurry, as he always does when anyone speaks of that life apart from his, which the New Year is to bring me. But we very seldom do speak of it here, except when Jerome makes us—I, of my own accord, never.

How quickly it seems coming, the last day of this already dying year ! The sycamores in the long meadow are leafless—quite leafless now, though they have held their leaves sturdily this autumn—and I have sheltered all my plants, and seen the woodcock come. I am glad I have so much to do. It is good for me not to be idle now. There is all mother’s beautiful present of linen to hem and mark, and mother and I have countless other things to consult over—chief among them all, mother says, my wedding-dress. How strange the words look, now I have written them ! Chief among them all, I say, my Christmas present for Jerome.

The furniture for his little library at the Rookery is coming from London with the other furniture ; but what I want is something very special—something that he would not think of for himself, and so something which, while daily near him and useful to him, shall remind him of this Christmas at the farm—and of me. I have enlisted father’s help, and advice too, as well as Tom’s ; yet we have decided on nothing even yet. We know so little here of what a London man would like in his library, beyond its usual furniture. Perhaps Tom will choose for me, if he really goes to London in a few days, to do a little business for father, as father wishes. Of course I cannot help feeling as if I would like best of all to choose it myself ; but still Tom is very wise, and of course I always like what he likes.

Even this morning I had a few lines from Jerome, written on his journey—and how much they told me ! I wrote to him to-day. I hope he will not be disappointed in this letter of mine—my first, and the only one I am to write to him this time, because he could not tell where he would be after he left Glasgow ; and he would not have my letter fall into other hands, he said, while he himself might be on his way home. It was but a short letter ; for, strange as it seems, my heart was too full to utter much. But I think he would understand.

November 8th.

How strange it seems ! I cannot believe it even yet ; though there is my little trunk packed, and addressed to London, and here lie my warm travelling things, even to my gloves, ready for the early morning.

I am going with Tom.

I have had to say it to myself many times, because it is so hard to realize yet. Only this morning I was sure that my first long journey from home would be with Jerome, on the New Year's Eve, and I felt even that quite near. Now—can it be really true ? It is at no distant date that I am going, but to-morrow—only to-morrow.

Mother has just left me. She scarcely seems to believe in my going. It was father, I think, who so quickly decided it, when he read Edith's cordial invitation to me ; and it was Tom who took the idea up so heartily, and instantly, and then would hear no word of a change of plan.

It was a very warm and kind letter from Edith, who is in London now with her mother and brother, and will come back into Devonshire with me, if I will stay with her just through this week of Tom's visit to town.

'I have a treat in store for you,' she says, 'that you will never forget. You must come now, Thisbe, for your long-talked-of glimpse of town. It would be cruel to let Tom come alone, when it will so soon be too late for you to go with him, and help him to enjoy himself.'

'I'm delighted,' father says, his kind eyes very bright and pleased, as he reads this. 'It has been unfair to Tom all along to cheat him of the little trip you and he were to have in October. I would far rather that you went together, pet ; and you will be at home again as soon as Mr. Standish is.'

And I saw Tom wished for this, and even mother ; though mother wished it least, and at first even found it rather hard to say it would be a very good thing for me to be able to choose my own Christmas gift for Jerome, and that she would like me to buy my wedding-dress myself in London, that that might surprise him too.

I have been thinking since of other gifts that I can bring ; and all day, until now, the anticipation of the journey has been most pleasant. But, now that the excitement of the day is over, somehow I wish I were not going. It is childish, I know, to be so changeable ; but need I have left the dear old home until this happy year was gone ? I suppose I said this to mother, for she has just been telling me that everything seems dreary on the last night before a journey, and that in the morning it will be all bright and pleasant again, and I shall be longing to go.

I have a list of things mother-wishes me to buy in London,



and I have all the twenty guineas father said was to be Tom's and mine; and Tom has I do not know how many more; and so, with our dear ones' blessing, we shall go.

Cecil Street, November 11th.

It has been very delightful for these three days, but I would not live my life here for the world. I know I shall enjoy myself even till we leave, but I shall very willingly start homeward when Tom is ready. I daresay the silence will seem curious to me at first when we go back—just as the noise here bewildered me, though Edith's brother tells me, laughing, that Cecil Street is silent as the grave.

They all laugh over my intense enjoyment of everything—I feel as if I enjoyed even my own bewilderment. For the first two days Tom and Edith took me wildly about, giving me what they called 'a general idea of London,' while Tom finished father's trifling business; and we took hurried meals where and when we chose, afterwards joining Mr. and Miss Karne for the concert one night and the wax-works another. But to-day Edith and I have been shopping busily, and have bought nearly all that mother wished me to buy; as well as my own little gifts, and ordered my Christmas present for Jerome. How it will surprise him and how I love to think of his surprise! But then do not I love to think of anything that lets me think of him? I wonder whether they guess, when they so often jest me on my sudden quietness, that something I have seen, or heard, or said, has brought Jerome to my mind, and it is hard to break that thought again? Yet is he ever really absent from my heart through one minute of the day, even in all this whirl of strange excitement?

To-morrow we go to the Palace at Sydenham; and, whether elsewhere or not, we meet here to dine at six, and then are to have the one special treat that Edith has promised me—that is to see *Romeo and Juliet* at Drury Lane Theatre. It will be a treat indeed for me. I know this well, though Edith says I can but faintly imagine what a delightful evening is in store for me. Karl Muller is to act *Romeo* for this one night; and, as Edith says, anyone is fortunate who has even standing room, because he has retired from the stage, and is not likely to appear again.

I have often and often heard of this wonderful actor, and have wondered with Jerome many a time whether I should ever see and hear him, longing, of course, to do so. I suppose Jerome is tired of these amusements that delight me so, for he never seemed to wish to see even this famous man, or any other famous man or woman.

I wonder whether he will come through London on his way from Scotland to Devonshire, and, if so, if it might be before we leave. He would return, he said, on the thirteenth, that is the

day after to-morrow ; and we go home then. I wish—— What was I going to say before that? Edith declares she will dress me to-morrow night, or else I shall look too prim to go. And she made me buy a high cap, and a sort of muslin shawl, and deep cuffs, to wear over my quiet black silk, and in which I fancy I shall look just like mother, only not so pretty. But Edith says I shall be like a quaint old picture, and then adds, laughing, that anyone who loves me as I am will love me doubly as she will make me look. That sets me wondering. Could Jerome love me twice as well as he loves me now? Ah no! It is far, far better than I deserve as it is ; and impossible to me to dream of greater love.

Come back to me soon, Jerome, dear heart !

November 12th—no, November 13th,  
for it was midnight quite two hours ago.

Let me write it now. What else is there for me to do? Years hence I may read it, when tears have come. But perhaps never! Perhaps tears would mercifully break my heart, and I should die. No, no; even to-night do not let me say or think such thankless thoughts. If the tears may ever come, my eyes will not ache so, and my heart will not burn as it burns now. What can I do but write? How strange the little white bed looks to me, where I have slept so easily and so well! Shall I *ever* fall asleep again?

If I had not come—— No, no; no word of that. It is too late.

What a day this was! Everything I saw or heard was as pleasant as it was new to me ; and under all lay my great anticipation of to-night's enjoyment. And still further down—like the river calm beyond that restless little waterfall at home—the thought of our return to-morrow, of meeting our dear ones again at home, and finding Jerome there ; never to part from him again, except just for that little distance between the Rookery and home.

When the evening came, and it was time to go to Drury Lane, I seemed to have reached the pinnacle of delight—so Edith said at least, laughing at me, when she came in to put my cap on, in return, she said, for my having looped her hair so prettily.

'Don't you think, Edith,' I asked, looking curiously at myself in the glass when she had finished, and feeling as if I gazed at someone else, 'that I look much more as if I were going to act myself than to sit and see others act? How well I should represent my own grandmother!'

'You look more like a child than ever,' Edith said. 'Like a child in her great-grandmother's dress.'

'I would like to take these laces and muslins off; unless—

unless you would really think me too countrified to go with in my plain open dress,' I asked, looking with great admiration at Edith's dainty lemon-coloured robe with its pale blue slashings.

'I would indeed,' laughed Edith.

And so I did not change it; and there they lie now, in dreary whiteness, as a pall might lie over a tiny coffin.

'Don't forget your flowers,' Edith said, as we left the room. 'Walter would be offended.'

'Aren't they wonderful nosegays for November?'

'Don't call them nosegays before Walter,' said Edith, laughing. 'He is not used to you, and he would wonder. Make haste: I expect "our boys" are waiting for us.'

They were both waiting in the lighted sitting-room with Mrs. Karne, and they all quizzed us a good deal when we came in.

'Why,' asked Tom, his eyes growing a little puzzled, though they had met mine very smilingly, 'do you two look so different? If either one is exactly the right sort of dress to wear, the other must be the wrong.'

'A contrast is always safer than a bad match, eh, Edith?' laughed her brother, and then put my arm in his.

'Really,' Mrs. Karne said, 'being, as you are, Miss Lee, rather noticeable, as one may say, it would have been wiser to go in a more usual evening dress. This kind of thing is always—a—*noticed*, as I said, and, with such a thoroughly country face as yours, unwise. Good-bye. I hope you will enjoy yourselves.'

How impossible it seemed to me to do otherwise! Even the short drive amused me, though Edith says she hates these noisy, crowded streets. And, when our cab was blocked in the line of carriages before the theatre, I never thought the waiting tedious. It was so new to me, this crowd of faces, that I could not help looking out upon them. Besides, did not every minute bring us nearer to the delight in store for us?

I think I shall never forget—do I not know I shall never forget?—my first bewildered gaze around that immense and crowded theatre. Could it be possible for those hundreds of people, so far away as it seemed, stretching to the very roof of the gigantic building, to hear the gentle language of the old play we had come to see? Yet, if not, would they still be crushing in, and silent too, and waiting, as it seemed, with a great expectancy?

We sat low, and close to the green curtain. Mr. Karne said he had thought we should like that better than the boxes and I thought so too, when he pointed out to me which the boxes were. He told me it had been hard work to get seats at all, and that I could very readily believe when I saw how the people seemed to be entering in a constant stream, and through many doors at once. How I enjoyed watching them!

‘Is every other theatre in London closed to-night, Mr. Karne, for all the people to come here?’

But, when I asked this, Edith glanced at me, across her brother, and raised her eyebrows; so I knew my question had shown my great ignorance.

A very bright-eyed, kind-looking, elderly gentleman sat on one side of me, and presently I began to be afraid I had disturbed him, in my excitement, and was just going to beg his pardon, when I caught him smiling.

‘Is this your first experience of a theatre?’ he asked me in a quite friendly voice.

‘Then you are most fortunate,’ he said, when I had answered him; ‘for you are to hear the finest actor in England, and in his finest part. So you see, even if this were to be your last experience as well as your first, you would have something to remember all your life.’

‘I know,’ I said; and I could feel how glad I looked. ‘I never thought when I came to London I should have such enjoyment as this will be.’

‘But how do you know it will be a great enjoyment, as you call it?’ he asked, smiling. ‘You may have notions of your own about Romeo’s love-making, and they may be destined to be knocked to pieces.’

‘Mr. Muller’s notion is Shakespeare’s, surely?’ I asked, turning, and waiting anxiously for a reply.

‘Shakespeare’s, beyond a doubt, as far as I can judge,’ he said, seeming quite willing to enter into a conversation upon this subject even with me, ‘but not the Shakespeare usually meted out to us. You must judge for yourself though, and be prepared for a very madness of enthusiasm in the audience. No man has ever been more thoroughly appreciated, or deserves it better; and nothing on the English stage has ever been finer.’

‘That is too bad, for Mr. Muller is a German, is he not?’

‘I suppose so; but, like all good actors, he has dropped his nationality. In this play he has all the passionate soul of the Italian lover, and all his poetry of word and glance; yet the intensity of his love throughout is purely English. I remember most of this generation’s players, but there has never been a lover on the stage to be compared with Muller. I supposed Barry used to be magnificent in such parts, and the world went mad over him—for a time. But Karl Muller, though as insinuating and irresistible as he was, has a power and intensity of his own, which make his tenderness almost too real.’

Walter speaks to me now, but I only turn my head and nod or smile. I like to hear this old gentleman talk. I like to learn all I can about this famous actor before I lose myself in watching him: and I will remember everything, that I may tell Jerome afterwards. I like to think I have all this to tell him

when I shall have heard so many things about his visit to Scotland.

'I am thinking,' I say, involuntarily, when this kind old gentleman pauses a minute, 'how much I hope a friend of mine will come some day to see this play.'

'Your friend may see the play, probably,' he says, his kind little wrinkled face all full of amusement; 'but he will not see the actor. Muller has left the stage.'

'And yet——'

'Yes, and yet he plays to-night, as your eyes say. Have you heard nothing about this special performance? It is for the benefit of the widow of an actor whom everyone liked and respected; pitied too, for he was filling passably well these very parts that—after Muller had once made them his own by the strong force of genius—could be appreciated from no one else. They are always difficult parts to make much of, and he did very well, poor fellow! He was a Scotchman, and this performance has been given in Glasgow, a few nights ago, to an immensely crowded house. A splendid financial success both nights will be, and the widow will have cause for gratitude to Muller, though he did so readily eclipse and ruin her husband. If he had lived till now, the retirement of the greater actor would have given him a better chance.'

'I wonder he retires, if he is so very great and clever,' I say.

'So do I.'

'I suppose,' said Mr. Karne, leaning across me to address my neighbour, as if to remind us of his presence, 'that never was a stage lover so fascinating as Karl Muller. I think his kiss and embrace are utterly unlike anything seen on the stage before.'

'The stage! You forget *that* when he acts,' the old gentleman answered, almost pettishly.

'And I daresay,' Walter goes on, 'that, with that exceptional power of his, he plays the lover often when he has no stage to play it on. Rather a fatal gift, though, I should call it if I chanced to be his wife.'

'He has no wife, sir. Now we'll let your little friend listen to the band.'

So this was the only one night I could have seen Karl Muller act! How very kind it was of Edith to have found this out and prepared this treat for me! I told her so, in a whisper behind Walter's head; and she smiled and nodded, as if my great pleasure pleased her too.

When at last, while the music went softly on, the picture before us was slowly lifted, I felt my breath growing quick, and almost painful in my intense excitement. I was very sorry a moment afterwards, because it made Mr. Karne whisper me to remember this was *only* a theatre. Why need I remember that, if all might be so real to me that I could forget it?

I was watching and listening with every power I possessed—almost forgetting, in spite of all that had been told me, to look more eagerly for one especial figure—when suddenly there rose a wonderful sound, behind me, around me, above me, *everywhere*. The mighty concourse of people all seemed to be in motion, and I was frightened a little, in my ignorance, and felt my face grow white, as I looked questioningly round the crowded theatre, where there seemed no escape.

‘It is all right,’ whispered Mr. Karne, laughing. ‘Didn’t you hear the “See where he comes”? Look round again at the stage. They are only greeting Romeo.’

‘Well?’ questioned the old gentleman beside me, bending his head towards me, but keeping his eyes on the stage, ‘what do you think of him? He treads the boards like a king of them, eh?’

I am gazing at the one figure standing apart on the stage—a slight and yet commanding figure, dressed like a beautiful picture, I think, with wonderful eyes, looking out among us, and yet not seeming to see us. I am gazing—gazing—while the old gentleman goes on—

‘They might have postponed all this till the play was over. They might leave Romeo alone, and give this ovation presently to Muller himself.’

Muller! Yes, that was his name. Had I not heard it many times? Yet I had forgotten it that minute, because something—something—what was it? Something in the step, or glance, or attitude reminded me of—Jerome. Ah, no, no! I think that even in that first moment—while I tried to think that a stranger was reminding me of him I loved—I knew him! In spite of the marvellous strangeness of the scene and dress, my heart knew him, and gave a cry which was so terrible when it passed my lips that I shuddered at the sound of it. This was Jerome! This was the life he had lived before he came to us, on that summer day so very long ago! This was the life that he had chosen, and yet had guarded as a secret from me! This was the past that he had kept in darkness, while I had never doubted—never questioned—never even wondered! This was—Jerome!

How many years ago did he and I part at the gate of the old farm, and he told me simply that he was going to Scotland? Had he known so well that I should not question him? And I wrote to him there—wrote to—this Jerome! How many years had passed since then?

There is a sound about me like a storm on our wild Devon coast. Am I rocked upon it with this clamour in my ears? or is the water rising to my eyes and blinding me?

It is all fading now, the dear old home! It is beyond my reach, and I am sinking

Oh, mother—mother !

‘Thisbe, isn’t this splendid? Take the glass and look at Romeo. Didn’t I tell you you would have a surprise?’

‘A surprise? What surprise?’ I am quite conscious that it is Edith’s voice addressing me, and I am trying to see her.

As I speak to her, Tom’s face beyond grows clear to me ; and I see it touched with great alarm. I see him change places with Mr. Karne in a quiet, authoritative way ; and then he takes my hand in his, as if we were in the dear old porch at home. Oh, that we were ! Oh, my heart, my heart, that we were !

‘Shall I take you away, Thisbe?’ he whispers, his voice so broken that it sounds to me like ‘some one else’s voice. ‘Will you come with me?’

‘Oh, Tom, why did you bring me here? Home is best! Home is best! May I go home?’

‘My dear,’ Tom answers, breathing so quickly I can scarcely understand him, ‘do not let them see you moved so terribly. It will soon be over—or I will take you away at once, if you think you can walk. Nothing can be explained to-night, but it will all come right. This is a cruel jest though, and one I never can forgive.’

‘Then—Edith—knew?’

‘Yes ; they knew.’

What a strange, proud, wicked strength that gives me ! No one is true to me. No one trusts me. No one speaks the truth to me. My eyes burn as if a fire raged behind them, and my fingers are locked with an agony I feel through all my frame.

‘I will listen,’ I say, thinking that I whisper it to Tom, though I see he does not understand, for my lips are growing stiff and useless. ‘We came to see the famous actor ; we must not go till we have seen him. It is very wonderful, they say ; and we wanted to see it, didn’t we, Tom? Don’t look so troubled. I shall not faint, and when it is over we can go home. He will not be there, and I want—mother. Oh ! Tom, you will take me home—when this—is over ! They are so true—so true, my dear ones—there.’

‘Tom,’ says Edith’s voice, sounding clearly and distinctly after my choking words, ‘take the glass—do—and try to enjoy this treat. I wonder which Thisbe thinks most natural, the lover off the stage or on?’

No other word is needed to bring back my shattered, fading senses. Should she see my breaking heart? Should Tom be ashamed of his sister before these two? Dear Tom, who looks so anxious and so angry, and who has lost all his pleasure in this night, through me !

I am not going to faint, I know ; but I feel so weak that I lean forward on the elbows of my seat, and close my hands

upon them, with a grip whose very effort rouses me. I will not take the opera-glass that Edith sends me, for could anything make me see more clearly than I do one face and figure on the stage?

The theatre is silent now, and he is speaking. Every word I hear; while an old memory holds me as a dream holds us in our sleep, and I dream that he speaks to me, in just those tones—far away in our Golden Valley—long, long ago, when I was a girl, and others trusted me.

Sometimes he goes away for a long time, or there falls a curtain down between us; and then there is a sound as if the sea rose all around me; but I never stir. With the close grip of my fingers paining me, I sit listening for his voice again, my eyes hot and aching, yet waiting wide open for his coming. I scarcely see the girl to whom his passionate, undying vows are plighted. Indeed, in all the vast and crowded building I can see only him; but I see every glance of his, every gesture, every change of face. Once or twice somebody speaks to me, but now I cannot separate the words from the surging of the sea around me, or the music of the band that seems so far away.

‘Are you able to come home, dear, now before the end?’

‘Why before the end?’ I ask, in a dazed, bewildered way, while the agony of Romeo’s passionate death-scene is making me shiver as if with ague.

So Tom lets me stay, and I am vaguely conscious how his gaze haunts my face in untold trouble; but I cannot turn to meet it. I think I have not strength to turn, while this horror is upon me of Jerome’s death, and that wonderful whisper of his—*Thus with a kiss I die!*

I do not faint, I do not even cry aloud, when, for the last time, the stage is hidden from me, and that excited clamour in the crowd grows beyond all restraint, while they utter one name only. But I feel how I must trust to Tom to lead me, and I am not surprised when people look hard at me, or even whisper to Tom; for I know they are wondering why I am here—I, so out of place, now that I have touched the end of my life! Am I not myself wondering, wondering over it? When was it that I came here first? The room was not filled with sorrow then. I thought I was happy. I remember thinking no one in the great room could be happier than I. When was it that a stranger talked to me of the great actor? I remember how I listened, eagerly and joyfully, thinking I would tell it all to Jerome presently—presently. I did not know then that I had seen the famous actor once before—long ago—had seen him acting then too, though there was no deafening call like this upon his name. His name! Which name is his? Which is the name he taught me to love, so long ago?

I raise my hand to my head wondering, wondering—and at



the touch I laugh, remembering how Edith dressed me for this scene.

'It is not that I look ill, Tom,' I say, whispering, while they stare at me. 'It is the cap.'

No one but Tom knows why I laugh. No one hears my laughter in this mighty rush of sound.

### HIS STORY.

November 13th.

It is so usual a thing for me to receive notes at the stage-door that I opened this one indifferently, as I stood among my old fellow-players, moved more than I would like to say on this last night by their genial praise and fellowship, though laughing heartily myself at the egregious flattery that tainted it. I stood under a gaslight, waiting for a moment's quiet to lift the letter in my hand and read it; and my eyes—so quickened by long practice—took in the merry, careless scene for the last time—as I knew. But when I saw the handwriting of my note this noisy scene all faded from me as if it had been a vision or a dream, and I breathed once more the dear old air of Homer Hill.

My hand, that had been so firm through all the farewell grasps to-night, actually shook as I opened Tom Lee's pencilled note, and I saw the women look at me curiously. In every trifling detail, with every gleam of splendid colouring and every tawdry adjunct, the scene comes back to me, with its heart-sickening accompaniment of those words I read. Have I been alone for one minute since, without their burden echoing heavily in my heart?

'Thisbe is in town with me, and at this address. She saw you act to-night. Can you come to her? She does not know I send; but what else can I try? Her heart seems broken. Why did you treat us so?—T. L.'

They were still laughing and complimenting me, even after these few simple and spontaneous words of Tom's were photographed before my eyes for ever; and the world seemed just the same around me, when I watched the letter burn—hearing the while some thing they said of my own utterance of the 'Tis a strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think.' How curious it sounded! I had known that this night was to be the death indeed of the Romeo that the world chose to praise; but was it to be my death too?

They questioned me about my sudden silence in the merriment, rebuking me because this was my 'last night.' The phrase had a terrible meaning to me, and fitted itself among the words of Tom Lee's letter.

I remember going away and changing my dress with fingers

that felt useless, and help that seemed to hinder instead of hasten; yet, when I went back among my comrades, some one asked me, laughing, if I had used magic for such speed. I remember that, as I left the theatre, they clustered round me, reminding me we were to sup together on this last night—had I not long ago accepted their invitation, and was not the banquet given especially for me?—and that I told them of course I should come back. Why not? Why not? And while I said it I wondered, in a stupid way, if they could really understand what they were asking me.

I remember that I fancied I could walk more quickly than a horse could take me, because the streets around the theatre were not clear even yet, and I hoped too that the night's frosty air might clear my brain a little of these mists and miseries.

Thisbe had seen me to-night! After all my despicable concealment, she had seen the truth before she had been prepared by me. She had come, in her perfect, happy trust in me, and had found deceit indeed. Oh, why had I not myself told her? Why had I ever had a secret from my love? I had never doubted her—never could I doubt yet love her so—then why had I nourished this inborn reticence of mine, fearing that in her simplicity she would not understand? It should never be again—never in all my life. But was this resolve made too late?

I stopped before the house in Cecil Street, with a sudden, inexplicable feeling that the last half-hour had been a dream, and that now I was awaking. For could it be possible that Thisbe was here? Was I to find my sweet wild rose here in the heart of the great city, which was so hard and different a world from that fairy vision of it which had been hers only a few days ago? 'Oh, love, it shall be so again some day,' I cried, 'if you forgive me!' And then I covered my eyes a moment, as I entered the brightly-lighted, unfamiliar room.

But not the room alone was unfamiliar to me. Tom met me on the threshold, and spoke to me in passing, and his voice was unfamiliar to me too; hard and stern as I could never have fancied his pleasant fresh young voice could sound. But I did not hear what the few words were, for I had looked beyond him, and seen Thisbe, pausing startled, with her lifted eyes upon my face. In that first moment my hands went out to clasp her; my heart leaped in the joy of seeing her; but she too looked unfamiliar to me. It was not the unaccustomed dress, for no dress could change my darling's lovely face; it was a new look there; something else had changed my bright little Thisbe of Homer Hill into this still, fragile-looking girl whose eyes looked so feverishly brave in her white wondering face. And this change I had brought! This sorrow I had given her!

‘Thisbe, forgive me!’

The cry burst from my heart and lips when I saw her; but, when she heard it, she drew back slowly from me, with her eyes still upon my face, and both her hands upon her heart.

‘Why did you come?’ she asked, and while I paused, because I could not tell her Tom had sent to me, she spoke to me again.

‘I am going home.’

‘Not without me, Thisbe. May I tell you——’

‘No,’ she answered, the frightened, feverish look growing in her wide innocent eyes, and her lips quivering, so that the words could scarcely pass, ‘never again—with you. Where need I ever go again with you? Your future is as far from me as—you chose to put—your past.’

‘I fancied it was not for your happiness to know. Oh, my love, believe me in this! To you, in the innocent, untroubled life you lead, I feared that such a life as mine would seem——’

‘Should I have questioned only what it *seemed*?’ she asked, with a quiet, weary scorn, which made me very quiet in my great despair. ‘Should I not have known you and—judged?’

‘It came so gradually. Remember that, in your pity for me, Thisbe. At first I was so utterly a stranger, there was no need to tell; and then—then came my overmastering love for you, and the craven fear of turning you against me—the fear that you should hesitate, in your innocence, to link your life with that of one of whom the world must talk. And I had left the old life then for ever, Thisbe. It was to be mine no more. I would live only such a future as we had talked of——’

‘Oh, hush!’ she cried, starting as if in sudden pain, but the next moment still again, and with her hands still pressed upon her heart.

‘Never once did you *ask* me of my past, Thisbe. I should have told no falsehood to you if you had, though I was cowardly and could not voluntarily tell. I hoped so much in my love for you. How could I with my own hand dash from my lips the cup of perfect happiness which I had tasted for the first time? I had never loved before, and my love was such a blessing for me. It was of the future that we talked together, and all my future life was yours.’

‘Built on deceit,’ she said, in a slow, pausing way. ‘If I were unworthy of your trust in all, I was unworthy to share this future with you; for how could you trust me then, if not before? Did you think we could live our lives together with the darkness of mistrust between us?’

‘Thisbe,’ I said, in sudden terror of this new scorn upon her face, ‘do you think I wooed you in a name that was not mine? Have you thought me capable of that? The name you heard to-night—the name you read to-day—is only the name the public know me by; for I gave that to the world, and kept my own

They had no right to ask the other ; it belonged to—to my other life. Oh, Thisbe, do you forget all those dear promises you made to Jerome Standish—not to the actor who has died to-night ?'

'I don't forget,' she said, lifting one hand to her head. 'If I forgot, I should not—suffer—now.'

'Oh, love,' I cried, in passionate appeal, 'you said you loved me once, and I am still what I was then, when you loved me !'

'Not,' she said, speaking low and quick in her disdain, 'what you seemed to be.'

For a few minutes the room swam round me, and I grasped at what was nearest to me, feeling all my strength and power go. Why had I not dreamed—long ago on that happy evening in the twilight when she had called me 'husband'—that this would be the end ? Her love could not be like mine, for no knowledge of a secret she had kept from me, even through all her life, could have dethroned her from my heart.

'Forgive me, love—my love !'

Again the cry had burst from my lips, and again she silenced me with a slow, pained gesture.

'Don't say those words—to me—again,' she said. 'And will you go ? I am—so tired.'

'What have they told you, Thisbe ?' I asked, trying to still the passion of my grief. 'So many lies are told of public men that why should I be spared ? What have you heard to-night that you should scorn me so ?'

'I have heard—yourself, and I have seen you, and I know how long you have hidden from me—everything. I—I have nothing else to say.'

'And the treachery of others that betrayed me to you, you will forgive ?'

I had not meant to say it. How gratefully I would have called back the hot and hasty words of anger against any friends of hers ! But she could not know this ; and so I did not wonder that she answered me with such coldness.

'I have nothing to forgive—you or others. They thought it wise perhaps for me—to know. And you—you only showed me that you could not—trust me. It was better for me to know—now—before it was too late. I am going home. I shall be—happy—there ; though to-night it seems to me that life—is over.'

'Oh, my own love,' I cried, with a passionate entreaty, 'listen to my one excuse and my one prayer !'

'No, no,' she whispered, shuddering as she drew farther from me, with a faltering and uncertain step, while a film seemed gathering slowly in her lovely, troubled eyes. 'Your voice—hurts me. We have nothing more to say—you and I. Nothing more—ever !'

Yet, though she said it, I made a last appeal, pleading wildly

madly, in my love and my great despair. But she only turned away from me at last, weary of my presence, and, with her hands clasped tight upon her temples, called for Tom. I remember meeting Tom's sad face as I reeled unsteadily from the room; and I remember dazedly wondering what *his* pain could be. But it was the anguish of her face that haunted me through that long night, which I spent hurrying through the winter streets and roads, feeling that my life too was—as Thisbe had said—over.

## HER STORY.

December 9th.

How many weeks have I still to live, or could the time be counted now by days? This long illness of mine has been very merciful. It has prepared my dear ones for my longer absence. My place downstairs has been so long vacant now that it will be no shock to them—and perhaps even a little less grief—when they shall feel that it can never be my place again. How very, very thankful I am that this illness did not seize me until I was at home, where they love me! Oh, mother, what could I have done without you?

I remember our journey—Tom's and mine. Poor Tom! I remember how I noticed every trifle on our way, though Tom looked pained that I did so, begging me to rest. But how could I rest, when every sound struck my brain and the cushions hurt my head? I remember sorrowing a little over Tom's anxiety, and smiling now and then to show him how well I was. I remember asking him at every station was this home? And when he shook his head, and seemed so sorry to say no, I smiled again, and told him home was coming. I remember seeing Edith now and then among the people on the platforms, and that Tom, stroking my hand so tenderly, told me Edith was in London still, and should not see me for a long, long time. I remember leaving the train at last, and going with Tom out into a strange, wide street, and some one came and smiled at me and kissed me. And, when I had looked at him a minute, I saw that it was father. I remember how he lifted me into the phaeton, and wrapped me up, and told me we should soon be home; then how the carriage left the road sometimes and flew through the air; then fell again and crept upon the road. I remember that when some one said, 'Here we are at home,' I looked on before me, and tried to see distinctly through the mists that were so thick; and how, one moment, I would see a house or gate, and next moment there would be nothing. Then I remember father's arms around me once again, and his lips kissing me, and his dear voice saying brokenly something which I did not understand, for I could see the old porch now, and—mother!

‘Oh mother, mother!’

I remember the longing cry, and how mother caught me in her arms and held me through that fit of trembling. And there is nothing to remember after that.

I have been long ill, and mother tells me I am given back to those who love me; yet she walks sorrowfully too, as if she knew I was not strong enough to travel back through the Valley, having passed it once. And Tom scarcely speaks to me; but he comes softly in, and brings the wet chrysanthemums, then sits and holds my hand for hours, looking straight into the heart of the fire, as if he dare not trust his eyes elsewhere. And father—ah, father seldom comes, for it is terrible to hear him sob!

Slowly the hours and days creep on, and I try to believe that mother is right and I may live; yet, if so, why is the face of everyone who looks at me so sad? Why will father never look into my face at all? Tom tries to laugh at me when I gaze so wonderingly at my hands, and he wraps them in his, and tells me, with a gulp, that I must not be conceited, for they are no prettier now than they used to be. Poor Tom! Jerome would not know me now, I am so changed. Is it my own fault that I am dying? Was it wicked to love any one as I loved him? It is unhappy—oh, so unhappy—but was it wicked too?

Never since that terrible night has any one spoken his name to me until to-day. We were sitting at the fire together, mother and I, and the room was full of silence and of peace. Mother had the open Bible in her lap, for she had been reading to me. I was dreaming of those tender words, with my eyes fixed on mother’s wistful face, when she spoke the name that made me shiver as I sat in the warmth and light, and frightened her a little, though she was brave, and, having thought it best to speak to me, would do so.

‘Through this quiet time, dear one, when Heaven has been so merciful to us, surely we ought to have forgiven him.’

‘He has gone, mother. Oh, let me forget him, if I can!’

‘That seems impossible to you,’ mother says; and I know how cruelly true are her words. ‘And do you think, my child, that I can bear to see this misery of yours? You cannot get well while this wretchedness gnaws at your heart. Remember, Thisbe, we never asked him to tell us what his profession had been. He told us no falsehood. Perhaps we should have guessed, if we were not such simple out-of-the-world people. A man must follow his profession, Thisbe, and he had grown very high in his.’

‘Oh, mother, hush!’ I cry, shuddering at the memory her words bring back to me. ‘You did not see him. He has only loved me as—I saw that night that—he could love anyone. But it is not that I think of, mother; it is his mistrust. Think how

it would have been if father had hidden all his life from you.'

'As for his love that night, my dear one,' mother says, not noticing those last words of mine, though they have brought the tears quite thickly to her eyes, 'if he is so great an actor as the world says, no wonder it deceived you. Could a good soldier be in battle and not hew and hack men down, though you could not bear to see the deed?'

'There could have been nothing real or true in what he said to me,' I answer, very, very sadly.

'Or rather,' mother says, in her gentle, thoughtful way, 'everything that was best and truest in his nature and his life was yours. *You* were not acting on the stage with him. If I were a doctor's wife, would I covet or be jealous of the care and kindness that he gave his patients?'

'Oh, mother, you can never understand,' I answer from my heavy heart. 'It was so terrible to feel he had deceived me, so terrible to see how passionately he could love—someone else.'

'This would never have struck you, dear,' mother answers tenderly, 'if your life had not been so different a one from his. Don't shudder, Thisbe. His has not been a life that any man need hide. Though we could not do so at first, we read now the papers that Tom brought, and they say much of him. His own name is not mentioned, but that name the world knows him by has won its blessings as well as its fame. Though jealousy and envy may have dealt with it too, as they do with all those who throw their challenge to the crowd and walk bravely into the temptations we in our sheltered life know nothing of, yet he has lived an upright, honourable life, and has retired respected and beloved. The papers say much of his benevolence in giving these performances for the widow, Thisbe; coming back to the stage in simple compassion to her, after he had left it, and when he was—so they said, my child—on the eve of marriage. Oh, Thisbe, hush! That laugh is so unlike you.'

'Whom is he going to marry, mother?'

'No one,' mother answers, solemnly. 'If he has lost his first love he will have lost all trust in women.'

'He never trusted them,' I say, and try to smile, even though mother looks so hurt to see me, and I myself know how I fail. 'And, mother, how falsely the papers speak, don't they? Don't they?'

'Possibly,' mother answers, closing the Book, and rising as if she were glad that what she had meant to say to me was said. 'But Tom too could tell you stories he has lately heard of this one actor's life; and they should shame forgiveness from us all.'

'Mother,' I say, detaining her with my weak hands, 'why should he trouble you? Why should he hurt—us all? We were

so happy before he came—before he came here—to rest. And, now that our lives are so far apart again, let me—forget.’

‘Mother’—the whisper was quick and eager, in sudden fright, when she bent to kiss me—‘you will not let him come—here? Never here?’ And, when she did not answer, I sprang up, in a very ecstasy of fear, and put my arms about her neck. ‘Oh, mother, promise! Promise he shall not come to me! Say you will never bring him to me, for I could not bear it!’

And presently, very quietly, but quite solemnly, mother promises.

Am I really getting better, or only slowly—slowly passing? Is it bad for me to think so much and constantly, trying as I do to explain the many things which never seem to have puzzled me long ago? I have been downstairs several times, creeping about the old familiar rooms and feeling like a stranger in them; and our doctor says that any sunny morning I may be driven in the Valley for a time, wrapped warmly up, and not allowed to speak. But I have no heart to go, though I will try for mother’s sake—presently.

December 20th.

I have seen one or two of the old friends to-day, and, though I knew that my face shocked them, it has done me good, I think. Tom tells me so at least, when he comes in to me, as I sit in the firelight, wondering how soon I shall take my old place and go about my old tasks, and—for how long. He stands by me for a few minutes in silence, then, very gently, he speaks to me of Jerome, for the first time since he brought me home.

‘Thisbe, Mr. Standish is leaving England.’

‘Then you have seen——’

‘No, never,’ Tom interrupts me. ‘Do you think he would come here—to us? But at last he has written to me. I fancy he has been ill, as he has never left London; but I don’t know. I have heard only what he tells me, and he does not tell me that.’

‘Why does he write?’

My question is very cold and very quiet, because I am afraid of breaking down and grieving Tom, for I am still so weak. Besides, I dare not look in Tom’s kind face and tell him that I shall be grateful when I can feel that Jerome is far away, and that our paths need never cross again.

‘He writes on business,’ Tom answers, just as quietly. ‘You see, the Rookery is still his, though he has no need of it now, and he has to make arrangements before he leaves. He tells me he shall be obliged to be here just for a few hours, but he writes that we may not run the risk of seeing him by chance, when we would rather not. He would not come even to his own house without telling me beforehand. He says how grateful he is for



your recovery. I felt that he had heard of your illness, though I don't know how. Thisbe, if you do not mind, I shall say that I will meet him at the Rookery on the twenty-fourth, if that day will suit him. He could not come to-morrow, and I shall be away all day on the twenty-second, and most of the twenty-third. You understand, my pet ?

'Yes.'

Tom talks to me for a long time after this, but I do not hear what he says. I am recalling Jerome's cruelty and deceit to me, recalling them hurriedly, hotly, passionately. I have no other thought of him now—none.

Will these three days never have passed, that Jerome may have left for ever ? I shall be at rest then, and go back patiently, even if a little wearily, to the old home-life. I am so impatient now, hard as I strive against it. Is there only one face in all the world, that it should haunt me so ? No book or picture shuts it out from me ; no voice will drown the voice that haunts me now. But it will be all different when these days are over and Jerome has gone away—far, far away. It will be better for me then.

Oh, hours, pass more quickly !

## HIS STORY.

December 24th.

I came down to Exeter last night, and this morning, in the pleasant winter sunshine, I walked to the Golden Valley. I had walked those seven miles often in the past summer-time, for the pure enjoyment of the walk, and every step of the meadow way, and every object in the wide silent view, I loved. I had felt how different the scene would look this day, changed (as my life was changed) from its summer warmth and beauty to the cold bare scene and future lying now before me. Yet I loved it so for its old memories, and knew so well that this would be the last time I could see it, that I walked slowly on ; recalling unconsciously what had been my bright anticipation through the old summer walks, and thus bringing a little faint, far gleam of the old sunshine on this last time, like the smile on a dear dead face.

I did not dare to go on up the Golden Valley, though I thirsted for a sight of the farm ; so I turned resolutely up the hill at once, repeating to myself again and again that Thisbe was better, that my darling would live, and that, when I was gone, her life would be calm and unruffled here ; as we see the face of heaven when the tempest has all passed. So I tried to turn my gratitude into gladness. But, though with such effort I had schooled myself, I could not—even when I reached it—pass the gate of this home that was to have been ours, but leaned my arms upon it, and hid my face, and tried once more only to remember gratefully

Thisbe was well, and that some day, in the years to come—not very far away perhaps—this perfect little home would be her own, and she would know that my unrest was over. Then she would understand why I came to speak to Tom to-day. To-day ! I think, if he could have helped it, he would not have bid me come on Christmas Eve—he was always so kind and thoughtful. And yet would anything make the day drearier for me than it must be anywhere ? He would meet me here presently, and tell me of Thisbe.

Thinking only of that, I could pass in at last, going slowly from room to room, with aching heart and eyes. But I shrank still from entering that one favourite room of my darling and mine, where we stood in the autumn gloaming, while she told me our betrothal bound us as solemnly in spirit as our marriage could. No, my love, I must not remember that to-day, or Tom will guess what a wreck my own life is, and tell you, dear, and bring my shadow once again in bitterness across your path.

Perhaps presently, when I have left this land, where everything reminds me of the lost past, I shall learn to rest—and even sleep. But now sleep seems as far from me as happiness—or Heaven !

I have never seen the rooms here furnished and quite complete, as they are to-day ; yet never before, even when I have come alone, have they felt utterly bare and empty as they do now. Because always before have I imagined her bright presence in every room, her light footfall on the stairs, her sweet face greeting me, her sunny smile giving the house its beauty and its brightness. What are those lines that dawned so faintly in my mind just now ?—

‘ Two gifts perforce He has given us yet,  
 Though sad things stay and glad things fly ;  
 Two gifts He has given us—to forget,  
 And then to die ! ’

It cannot be always so. It must often be to remember ever—*until* we die.

I have only that one room to enter now, and there I must await Tom’s coming. It is the room that Thisbe called my own—and I called hers—that was to be to both of us, as we used to say, the very heart of home. Even yet I cannot enter it, though my hand is on the door. How many a time we have pictured there the life we two would lead ! And are not those words ever echoing round me, which she spoke to me in this very room, when she told me that no parting—in its deep and bitter sense—was possible between us two for ever ?

We believed it then. She believed it as I did ; yet how far apart we are to-day ! Can we feel more widely severed even when the broad Atlantic swells between us, and, in my loneliness,

I say at night, 'Would God the day were here ! and say at dawn, 'Would God the day were dead' ? Alone ever, while every sound to me perhaps through the coming years will be her voice or step.

It must not be. I must fight with this feeling, till I kill it and free myself from its vain, cowardly grip. This be will live her pure life here, and I, in my solitary future, will try to be less unworthy of the memory of the love she gave me once.

After all, I am glad that this is Christmas Eve. Could I take the first stage of my new life on a better night than this ?

At last my hand is firm, and I can enter ; for I have prepared myself for the sudden chill to my heart in the empty, silent room—as we try to prepare ourselves on the threshold of a death-chamber. But preparation has been of no avail. The look of this room blinds me in a moment to all that is, and makes me see what is not. I cannot see the chill, and gloom, and loneliness. A strange delirium brings me back the scent of roses, and of that summer long ago—Ah ! this must be one of those dying visions when, they tell us, all our sorrows fade, and a glory rests on everything ; for some new warm light has filled the room, and shines upon the books and pictures ! And she is coming towards me now—my heart's desire—with the old love shining in her eyes !

I stretch my hands with one appeal for pardon, then I cover my eyes that I may not see the fading of the vision. And now one passionate sob breaks all the ice about my heart, and I have found the merciful relief of tears.

'Jerome, oh, my love, forgive me too !'

It is no dying dream. The wistful touch upon my hands can only be my darling's touch ; and when she takes them from my face my eyes rest upon her with a yearning tenderness too deep and glad for any vision. And she calls my name softly, and tries to make me understand.

'Jerome, I have striven to steel my heart against you, but the struggle nearly killed me. My heart was breaking, Jerome, but it could not change—to you. I have proved this so sadly, oh, my love, and in such suffering ! It was my own fault. I was hard and unforgiving, and I tried to think the fault all yours. But I never could. And I never dared even to remember what I might have said to you that night. May we forget it now ! Will you forgive me, and forget it all ? I fancied that you would, just here, where you have said you loved me ; and so Tom let me come—alone—to beg for this, and ask you not to leave me, because I love you so. Oh, Jerome, through everything—for all my life—I love you ! It was so terrible to hear that you were going, Jerome, for I had found I could not live my life without you. And we all want you back. We miss

you every day and every hour. Oh, Jerome, come with me back to the home where you taught us all to love you, and we will spend such a Christmas that this shall not be a selfish joy of mine! They are thinking of it, and it has made the old home bright again, after my selfish sorrow clouded it. Father will be waiting on the road to meet us, even now; and mother—oh, you should have seen mother's face, Jerome, when she watched me go, and told me how she should long for our return—yours and mine! I know she has been watching ever since. And there are such Christmas fires built, and even the roses are living to welcome you, Jerome. Come with me. Speak one word, to show that you forgive me. In this dear Christmas-time you will not turn away. There is so much to be forgiven us that it helps us to forgive each other. And you were always so patient with me that I can ask you even this. Oh, Jerome, Jerome, it breaks my heart to see your tears!'

Tears! Were there tears *still* in my glad eyes? Ah, but she must have known what such tears meant!

## [ ONE TERRIBLE CHRISTMAS EVE.

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I do not mention it to Deborah ! I particularly avoid mentioning it to-day, though I may have done so now and then at other times, when it has struck me how conveniently her nervous headaches visit us. But, though I do not mention it, the fact has never been borne in upon me so strongly as it is this afternoon of Christmas Eve. We certainly have had a good deal of trouble, and utterly in vain, so far, in looking over houses for the Soppendells ; but then I should have thought Deborah would feel with me what a triumph it would be to find them the right one at last, and have them settled within reach of us. And this advertisement in to-day's *Times* is so very promising ! It offers us exactly the house the Soppendells want, and in search of which we have taken so many fruitless journeys. And how nice it will be to add, as postscript to our Christmas letter, ' We have found precisely the house you desire, and it will be ready for you early in the year.'

' It will only be another disappointment,' Deborah remarks, with an unworthy ingratitude, when I so exultantly tell her we must go at once to see and secure this house. ' No advertisement ever tells the truth.'

I do not contradict Deborah (though I sometimes do), because we really have been so very often lured to bootless fatigue by advertisements ; finding, instead, of the very pretty, mellowed, secluded house we want, only interminable rows of brick and mortar, or forgotten tenements redolent of mould and animalculæ. But in this advertisement I at once detect a ring of truth, and am determined not to miss such a chance. Besides, there is a comforting sort of sensation in being told to ' apply to Mr. Lovely,' names augur much, I think. And Mr. Lovely offers exactly what we (and the Soppendells) want—*A picturesque detached residence, known as Sylvan Villa, charmingly situate*

*in extensive pleasure-grounds and fruit-garden, in a salubrious suburb. Near church and station.*

'Is not that an advantage, the station especially for Mr. Soppendell, and the church for Mrs. Soppendell ! They will be delighted, Deborah,' I say, putting down the *Times*, as there can be nothing in it of farther interest to either of us. 'And, indeed, there is nothing so attractive as individuality in one's dwelling. I don't wonder the Soppendells want a house that is not like everybody else's. Now we will go out and buy our Christmas-boxes, and after an early lunch we can go and see Sylvan Villa.'

We have a very amicable arrangement, Deborah and I, about our Christmas-boxes, for we buy each other exactly the same article. And, though this might lead a casual observer to suppose the gifts are of no great advantage to us, that would be quite wrong. We buy something which we should not otherwise have, and we consider it an annual luxury, or elegance, which has fallen to our lot in quite an unexpected and promiscuous manner at this festive season. To-day we have decided on Honiton fichus for evening wear, and the selection takes us long, because of the ribbons, Deborah's complexion bearing a tint a shade warmer than mine will bear ; but we choose at last to our entire satisfaction. Indeed, as we recall the fichus to our mind afterwards, and picture them on our new silks, though we say nothing personally flattering to each other, we have a general impression of their fitness.

But who would think of the blow that is to fall upon me in this placidity, when after enjoying a little warm lunch, with a cup of tea, Deborah suddenly takes one of her nervous headaches, and declares she cannot go to see Sylvan Villa ; no, not if I will crown her ; which, of course, I have no intention (and, indeed, no power) of doing. I entreat her to make the effort ; I appeal to her sense of duty, and then I reproach her like a mother ; but nothing avails, and all that remains is for me to go alone. My only comfort is that, in my own person, I shall have earned the Soppendells' undivided gratitude ; and I hope some innocent and natural means may be found of making them aware of this.

'I shall not be late, Deborah, and shall certainly bring good news,' I say, while I arrange my bonnet at the glass. 'But I do wish you were coming.'

'You are not thinking of my head,' sighs Deborah. And I am ashamed to own that I am not : at that particular moment I am thinking of my own. We live in Bayswater, Deborah and I, and I have to go to Victoria to take my ticket for the salubrious suburb. There is a train waiting for me when I reach the platform, which proves what a convenient line it is ; and the carriage I enter is quite filled, which proves what a favourite direction from town is this in which I journey. I have no one to talk to,

so I am conscious now and then of a jerk, as if I were pulled up heartlessly, at about fourteen or fifteen, on the way to forty winks. But really there is no incentive to me to keep awake, my fellow-travellers being so uninteresting, for it is difficult to me at any time to feel entertained by a row of gentlemen with newspapers before their poor shy faces, and all their care lavished on black bags, as is the manner of London gentlemen. It just a little surprises me to find that all the gentlemen, as well as all the newspapers and all the bags, have left me before I reach the salubrious suburb; but yet the fact soothes me, because it proves they are not hurrying in advance of me to seize on Sylvan Villa.

‘The station belonging to the salubrious suburb is a very clean and pleasant one, and I look round it approvingly before I leave it with brisk and hopeful step. Mr. Lovely’s office too is particularly neat, and papered entirely, as it seems to me, with repetitions of his own attractive name, printed on sale bills, in a manner to inspire confidence in his connection. I find Mr. Lovely himself quite an engaging man—or it may be his clerk; I do not feel in a position to assert until after dealings shall impress it upon me. He speaks feelingly about Sylvan Villa, and adds, with candour, that, though several parties wish for the house, he will see that I have my chance. He apologizes for not being able to send some one with me, but he assures me I shall have no difficulty in finding the villa, or in opening the door, as he will give me the latch-key. And if his office should be closed when I return (as it may be, because, being Christmas Eve, they hope to leave business early this afternoon), I can drop the key into the letter-box, he says. I am grateful that all the other parties have brought back the key in time for me to have it, and I put it at once safely into my pocket, then stand at the office door with Mr. Lovely for his directions, which are given thoughtfully and patiently.

I start off along a very pretty and quite countrified road, and walk for a long time undisturbed and comfortable. At last, just to make assurance doubly sure, I call in at a modest house on the way, to ask if I am going right for Sylvan Villa. The master of the house has to be extracted from a shed far down a garden before this question can be answered for me; and, indeed, he has to be released and returned to his shed, still before the question is answered, because no one on the premises can answer it. They never heard of Sylvan Villa; but, when I mention the road, a light breaks in upon them. They think that if I go on past the church—a light breaks in upon me too at that word, for did not the advertisement say, ‘close to church and station’?—I may find it. I thank the collected household, and go smiling on my way.

The road grows wider and quieter. How pretty it will be in spring and summer! I am conscious of walking far, as well as

fast, but after my return I need do nothing more this evening. I shall enjoy a chop, or something comfortable, with my tea, and then my own easy-chair and the new annuals to read. If there is anything to be done needing exertion, Deborah can do it. Has she not had all the afternoon to rest? Here is the church. I pass it and go on, knowing I cannot be wrong now; yet I look out for a friendly passer-by, that I may ask how near I am to Sylvan Villa. I only see a few young men at a tavern-door, and my heart fails me in opening a conversation with them. The road is still a pretty one, but it slopes downhill now, so that the walk is not so inspiring; but soon I forget all this, for before I have walked above a mile beyond the church I reach a gate, on which I can read the longed-for words, 'Sylvan Villa.'

Ah! was I not right, and will not Deborah have to apologize to me? Can anything, in any London suburb, be more likely to please the Soppendells than this picturesque, ivy-covered house, shaded (as it will be in summer) by these old trees which stand so thickly in the damp winter garden all around me? Certainly the inhabitants of this house will not be—what the Soppendells so dread—overlooked by neighbours. Certainly here they will find the very refinement of privacy.

With real delight I hurry to the door taking the latch-key from my pocket as I go. It is a good front entrance, and when I have entered and taken the key out of the lock I am pleased to hear how securely and unmistakably the latch catches. The lower premises are all good, though not in the best repair, for I notice a broken pane in one of the kitchen windows, and two or three loose boards. But I am not surprised, for the house has evidently been long untenanted.

Upstairs the rooms satisfy me as they do below, but it is such a new sensation to me to be alone in an empty house, that I hurry a little, hating the echoing sound of my own step on the bare boards. There seems an open and extensive view from every window, and even the attics are pleasant rooms, though for my part, if I were the Soppendells' maids, I should prefer the front one, because the back one has that senseless trap-door in the ceiling. Of course the agent will have the measures correct, but I would like to be quite sure, and I have brought my yard-ribbon to take the size of the chief rooms. I need not measure the attics, so I go down, and into one of the back rooms on the second floor.

'What a capital house it is!' I say to myself, as I draw out my measure. 'If the owner will undertake the few necessary repairs, it will be just the desire of the heart of the Soppendells. Suppose I had not seen the advertisement? Ah! but suppose'—this is the one cloud on my Christmas horizon—'all those other parties step in before me?'

My furs, and my long, rapid walk, make me warm in this



unaired house, even on Christmas Eve ; and as the air feels close I cross the room to open the window. What a beautiful position the house occupies ! The Soppendells can live here as thoroughly to themselves as if in a park of their own, and cannot even see a neighbour's house, or have the faintest fear of being overlooked. I am astonished to feel the wind blowing in upon me so lustily when I open the window (for as I walked I had scarcely noticed it), and before I take my hands from the frame, a sudden gust, passing me, blows to the door behind me.

I hear it slam, and then something fall from it outside, and I look round in amazement ; the door is latched tightly, and on this side there is no handle at all ! How has it been ? The handle must have been off on this inner side, and the handle on the outer side, holding the shaft that turns the latch, must have fallen when the wind slammed the door. I stand watching it helplessly, vacantly, not able even to credit what is so evident—that I am a prisoner in this room, doomed to spend the Christmas night in this empty, isolated house, in hunger, cold, and solitude ! No, I cannot believe it, though I say the words over again and again to myself, in my utter stupefaction. My mind cannot yet grasp anything so horrible, though my lips repeat the doom in store for me, and my eyes see the fast-sprung latch.

I go to the window as my only hope, and lean from it, looking every way for help. But there is no human form in sight. I look far and near ; then down below ; then feebly up into the quiet winter sky ; but what can come to my help ? The large garden that has delighted me is utterly silent and deserted ; the meadows beyond, that seemed so good a boundary to this house, are a picture of wide, bare emptiness. I look down, and there are but bare trees swaying weirdly in the wind. I call, in a shaking, pausing, trembling way, and then listen ; almost afraid of hearing any answering sound, yet trembling more when no other call breaks the silence. I call again—my voice growing stronger in my despair—and again. But what answer can I hope for ? Who would be wandering, in such an hour, there beyond this faded, neglected garden ? And, even if any stray man were there, could my call reach him ? Why had I not gone into a front room first ? Then possibly my call might have been heard by some isolated passer-by. But here !

I cannot be still in this beginning of my misery. I kneel at the door, and look helplessly into the hole from which the handle has gone. I put my pencil-case into it, imbecilely supposing it may turn the lock. I try again and again, most insanely, though the futility is apparent to me from the first. Then I rise to my feet again and beat the door, while slow hot tears fall from my eyes, and I look stupidly down upon them on my dress, fearing even to wonder why they fall, because I so fear meeting the truth face to face. I look around the bare walls vacantly, yet

I notice that the paper has three poppies on it—one crimson, one pink, and one white—and I can scarcely see the white ones now.

I lean once more from the open window, for the world seems a little nearer to me so ; and, when I feel my voice is not muffled by my tears, I shout again for help, waiting—waiting in the silence that follows, and wondering what I can do. I feel nothing of the cold even yet, for my great fear has made me feverish, and I dread shutting out the living world by closing the window. How far away can the nearest neighbour be ? I cannot see any white poppies on the walls now. What shall I do ? What shall I do ? No answer, save the despairing echo of the question in my heart—what shall I do ?

Why did I not *make* Deborah come with me ? She ought to have come. She had no right to subject me to this. And the Soppendells had no right to lay such a task as this upon me. They never would if they had guessed Deborah was going to desert me at the critical moment. There she is now in the warmth and light at home, knowing nothing about what utter solitude and fear can mean—I myself never knew it until now—sitting at our snug fireside, in her comfortable slippers, dozing, probably, over one of those Christmas books. Or perhaps she has the dear old doctor with her, and they are sipping tea, each side the blazing fire, in that convivial way I know so well, while he gossips as usual ; just as if we were old women like himself ! It makes it worse for me to picture them so. And, after all, the doctor may be visiting a very uncomfortable, poor patient ; and the fire may be very low at home, and Deborah may be feeling a chilblain, or her head may be really bad. But if—if they are chatting together as snugly as we sometimes do—they little dream of my—my own sob frightens me as it bursts from my shaking form. It sounds so pitiful, and so like somebody else's misery.

Once more utter stillness settles down upon the house, and so unbearable is this to me, and I feel so afraid of my mind going, that I try to repeat lines and verses. I daresay I have never learned anything by heart since I left school, for there seems a sort of mingling and confusion among them. But I go bravely on, stopping only where memory fails :

‘ Ye mariners of England,  
That sit at home at ease,  
How little do ye reckon upon  
The wreck upon the seas !

‘ My name is Grampian ! On the Norman hills my father feeds his flock. And keeps his only son, myself, at home.’

‘ It was the schooner *Hesperus*,  
And he held one of three ;

“ By thy long grey eye and thy long grey beard,  
Now wherefore hold'st thou me ? ”

I am going on indefatigably, when I am conscious of the silence

being disturbed by a faint creaking. In the first instant my heart gives a delighted bound, feeling it is a distant step outside, and that some one will presently come below the window, that I may throw the key down for him to rescue me; but in the next instant I know this sound is inside the deserted house, and is above me!

How can it be? I stand looking wildly up, just as there comes one heavy thump exactly over my head—the fall of a dead body! Ah! yes; it can be nothing else. I cannot move a limb. I stand as motionless as that dead body above, in my overwhelming panic. This must be the re-acting of an awful tragedy which has once been perpetrated in this ghostly house, and on this very spot where I stand. And the hollow, ominous sound is repeated, perhaps, in this terrible way on every Christmas Eve. There would be the stains of blood here under my very feet; only have I not read that blood will not sink through carpets? And have not the carpets all been carefully taken up? Even on the walls there would be ghastly splashes under this new paper—ah! the pink poppies now are undistinguishable there.

Is the ghostly tragedy over now, or are there spectral scenes to follow? I can only wait, too terrified to stir, for fear of even the faintest sound that I myself might make. Was it really I who had valued solitude and retirement once? Shall I ever cease to hate both after this night? Ah! what is that? A stealthy, creeping step, a slinking, lurking sound of footsteps, that may be one, yet may be many—so softened and subdued, so cunning and so slow—over my head; now upon the stairs; now in the lobby, just without my door, and pausing there.

In that moment my hair turns white.

Then—all my other fears seem to have been play beside this great, tangible horror that has its grip upon me now—I hear a whispering outside my door; a low, suppressed whisper, rapid and eager.

I do not know how long it is—how can I ever count those minutes that hold years in their course?—when the voices cease, and the steps pass slowly down the stairs, to seek, as I know, a murderous weapon. My fingers grip each other till there is blood upon my hands, as if to fit me for my share in this ghastly scene of robbery and murder. Were they living men or spectral forms? But, whether men or forms, I know that their return will mark my last hour. In this feeling of certainty with regard to my impending fate, the long tension of my attitude gives way. My eyes close a moment, in the weariness of their strained gaze, and I walk once more to the window, in that pitiful effort to bring the world around me once again—for the last time now.

I have heard doors opening and closing below, and now a step is passing to and fro under the window. Before this (how many hours before this?) I had eagerly longed to hear an approaching step in the forsaken garden; yet now that it is

here—so unmistakably passing backwards and forwards below me—I dare not call, nor make my presence known. It is not a ghostly step, so they are men, and not forms ; and, being men, how have they pursued me here ? Certainly no living man could pass that outer door as I secured it ; they can only have emerged from that terrible trap-door in the attic ceiling. And one of them has gone to the front of the house, and one is here at the back, that they may make my escape impossible. But need they fear, when I am so helplessly imprisoned in this room ?

I dare not look out, seeing in fancy the upturned, murderous face which may meet my gaze. Yet it is too dark now to see it, however fierce and fiery the eyes may be ; for not even the crimson poppies can be distinguished on the paper ; and only the square of bare, unshaded window breaks the darkness.

Time goes on, and the blackness of night is deepening around me, when gradually an awful thought forms itself in my mind—my poor, wandering, unsettled mind. This creeping step that I have followed, and the eager, threatening whisper, belong to an escaped madman ! A madman in whose power I am imprisoned, and may have to spend long and horrible days and nights, perhaps, before he chooses to let his cunning violence culminate in my death. Have I not read of the fiendish delight with which a maniac will lengthen out the torture of those who fall into his power ? And who, from that outer, fading world, can elude his crafty vigilance, and come to rescue me before it is too late ? Even after the terrible deed, who will ever find my body to give it Christian burial ?

And this is Christmas-time, and Deborah is in ease and safety ! Oh, why did I come ? We have but each other, Deborah and I ; why did I ever come away from her ? Do not all sensible single ladies stay at home on Christmas Eve ? Why do not all sensible single ladies stay at home for ever ? It is so much safer. How cold it is now, and how late ! It must at least be midnight—*only* midnight, yet a hundred nights seem to have passed since I had first so cheerfully thrown this window open, to see, with delight, that no human being's eyes could overlook us here. Ah, me ! have I ever really said that individuality is desirable in a residence ? Never again will I enter any house unless it is propped on either side by twenty of its own twin brothers, and has forty of its duplicates opposite. No wonder this isolated dwelling is not taken. If the owner would make it beautiful from roof to basement, and then let it without a rent, would I allow the Soppendells to inhabit it ? No. A thousand times, *No*.

Oh, horror ! There is a rustling of the bare branches of the tree outside the window, and a muffled, angry voice cries, 'I'm coming ! So you thought I shouldn't find you, eh ? I'm coming.' And then goes muttering on, hoarsely and savagely !

I have crept back from the window, and am standing now against the opposite wall, my eyes wild and fixed, my breath coming in gasps ; because I know this madman is climbing up to his final deed of bloodshed, and will soon step into the dark room, from that square of gloomy sky on which my glazed, wild eyes are riveted. But no face appears there ; and presently I hear a door closed beneath the open window, and two heavy bolts shot. Then I look out with a new wonder. The bare tree has been stirred and rustled by a sudden shower of rain, which makes the night more dreary and more lonely even than it was before ; and this heavy rain has driven in again the madman who has been pacing before my prison. Now he will come up to me indeed, and this will be the end.

I hear the slow, sly step up the stair—or many steps, I cannot tell, for there are voices—or one voice—muttering all the time, in that same savage, threatening way. And when I hear too that something heavy is being dragged up, I know it to be the weapon for my murder.

I cover my eyes, and try to remember what I ought to think of in this my dying moment ; but I am only wildly wondering how soon that step can reach my door, and how this tale of bloodshed will be broken to poor Deborah.

Suddenly now—over the dreary pattering of the rain outside, and over every weird and muffled sound within—there sweeps a startling peal from some subterranean bell in this terrible house. I hear it distinctly, and feel the shock through all my icy, trembling frame. Then the whole house totters, and I become unconscious.

When my eyes open, the room where I have been so long in darkness is lighted feebly (and a little weirdly) by a lean and poverty-stricken candle stuck in the empty grate. I am sitting on the floor, with my back against the wall, and my feet straight out before me, conscious only of a sensation of dampness in every garment and on every feature, and feebly conscious of being astonished that Deborah, who is kneeling beside me, should be damp too—Deborah being so particular about her dress. I think I slowly and sleepily begin to understand it a little, when I find that she is sprinkling water over me from the drawer of a kitchen dresser, which is held for her by the strangest object on which any eye could light—a stooping, feeble, shaking object ; with hollow, wild eyes, looking out from long and shaggy locks of unkempt hair, the very colour of pale ale.

I think Deborah is crying a little, when I turn my eyes from this strange sight ; but I cannot be sure, because when I see it is *really* Deborah, and meet her pitiful eyes, and feel her hand, and know she has found me, I faint again.

But only for a little time, I think, because there falls upon me such a deluge from the dresser drawer.

'Don't tell me anything about it yet, Hephzibah ; nothing till we get home, and have had something warm and nourishing. To think what my nerves have undergone in tracing you, and having to cut out that advertisement for the cabman, and trust myself blindly to him to find the house, and he taking me all round deserts and forests before he brought me here! And to think that that wretched object of a man—you needn't look round, for he went away when he saw you waking—should have come in here through a broken window for his night's rest—rest, indeed, in an empty house, with only bare boards to lie on!—and should have heard you, and got into the trap-door till he thought you were gone, and then went to scare the cats—at least, that's what he seems to say ; but he talks to himself, and I can't understand ; and I'm quite sure he is as mad as a March hatter—my nerves are in that state I don't know what anybody says. I've the cab at the door, and you are all right now, Hephzibah—a little damp, perhaps, that's all ; and I do hope this will be a lesson to you not to act in the eccentric way that is your delight, and wears me to a shadow. Tie your bonnet. I seem to hear that poor imbecile coming back, and I'm in that state of nerves that I cannot stand it ; though if he hadn't been here to let me in, and hadn't thought of that dresser drawer to bring the water in, I really don't know what I should have done—or, rather, what *you* would have done, Hephzibah. Where are you going now ? For goodness-gracious' sake, do consider the state you have put me into, and don't be so spasmodic !'

But I cannot help it. He looks such a feeble, helpless, harmless creature, shrinking back there in the empty hall ! Such a threadbare, sickly shadow of a man ; such a dazed, bewildered object—gone astray, not knowing how or when—that I cannot help it. It is such a little to do. There is no cab waiting to take him from this bare, desolate house to a cheery fireside. There is no warm, merry Christmas Day to dawn for him. Ah ! it is such a very little thing to do !

'But most unwise,' says Deborah—not knowing that I see her surreptitiously put back her purse, pretending she has never touched it—'most unwise.' But she says it with unusual haste and jerkiness, and says nothing more until we are warm and safe at home ; and mellowed by a little chicken fricassee, and a glass of negus afterwards—I tell this story, and she listens.

'And so,' Deborah says, when I have finished, and the negus (and other circumstances) have soothed and cheered us both a little, 'your hair grew white in a single night, did it, Hephzibah ?'

But Deborah has no right to smile ; for it certainly would have grown white in that single night, if—well, if it had not been quite white before !

## LADY CARMICHAEL'S WILL.

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LADY CARMICHAEL lay resting near the open French window, while Lilian and I sat together on the step of it, looking out upon the view from this new house of ours. From our feet the lawn sloped to the cliffs; beyond lay the sea, with the sunset flush upon its waters. We had only reached Bryn Arddail this very afternoon, and after our London spring the fresh sea breeze was most delicious to us. Lilian, with her face raised to meet it, heaved a long sigh of the purest and deepest enjoyment. Lady Carmichael smiled a little, hearing this.

'Lilian, you will soon droop with *ennui* here,' she said, 'and entreat me to take you abroad or to one of those gay country houses to which you are invited—anywhere, in short, so that you may feel yourself again a star among women, a little goddess among men. Mr. Macan says we shall have no society here; no one to speak to but each other.'

My lady said this with a quizzical glance at Lilian, but I am sure she detected, as readily as I did, the true ring in Lilian's ready answer.

'I don't want society, auntie. I don't want any new friend. I have you and Stella.'

Lilian said this with a smile, not only for Lady Carmichael, but for me too; once her favourite school friend, and now her paid companion.

'Miss Lilian must be so heartily tired of those carpet knights whoperpetually dance attendance upon her, that the absence of them will be almost a blessing.'

So it is,' cried Lilian, springing to her feet, and putting both her hands into those of the old gentleman, who had come round to the open window just in time to hear Lady Carmichael's last speech. 'How did you come, Mr. Macan?'

'By train, my dear. How else? I've an old acquaintance in Bryn Arddail, and I wanted to see him.'

Mr. Macan had been Lady Carmichael's intimate friend, as

well as legal adviser, for twenty years ; yet it was evident she had never heard before of his having an acquaintance in this primitive seaboard parish, to which she had been sent to recruit her failing health.

'You said we should have no society here at all,' she observed, in rather an injured tone.

'Nor will you, my lady ; but a village, however isolated and uncivilized, has one necessary appendage—its clergyman ; and I chance to know the man who is billeted here. May I introduce him to you ?'

'Yes, as he is a friend of yours.'

'Not for that reason,' returned the old lawyer, quietly. 'But as the year you have decided to spend in Bryn Arddail will be none the less pleasant for his acquaintance, and as I can answer that he will never intrude unwelcomely, and may sometimes be an acceptable addition to your party when you get tired of each other, I will introduce him.'

'We shall never be tired of each other,' said Lilian, in her prompt, impulsive way. 'Mr. Macan, what a beautiful place this is ! I'm perfectly certain it will give auntie back her health and strength.'

'Not a doubt of *that*,' put in Mr. Macan, confidently. 'A physician chose the spot, and I chose the house ; what could result but a thorough success ?'

'Tell me, who is this curate of Bryn Arddail ?' said Lady Carmichael presently.

'He is not curate, but Rector of Bryn Arddail, receiving as his stipend about one-half of what they give your junior curate in town. You look surprised, Miss Lilian. Do you see any reason why Hugh Lindsey should not work here for about one-quarter of the sum any one of your lovers pays his tailor yearly, and help the parish on it too ?'

'He cannot,' Lilian said.

She stood leaning against the window-frame beside me, looking away to where the village nestled among the cliffs, and I thought she spoke with unusual earnestness.

'I am not to be contradicted by you young things,' remonstrated the old lawyer, watching her. 'I am talking to Lady Carmichael, and you need not listen.'

But Lilian did listen. I do not think there was one word she missed, as her eyes wandered from the village to the grey tower upon the cliff, then away to the silent, beautiful sea.

'But surely,' questioned my lady when the lawyer paused, if this young rector be all you describe, he could obtain a rich living, where his talents would be more appreciated ?'

'I don't know about *appreciation* for his talents,' said Mr. Macan, with greater seriousness than was usual with him, 'but I think he is making "other ten" with them ; and perhaps his Master will be satisfied.'



'What a great thing,' said Lilian, softly, 'to have gained this influence you speak of over rough fishermen and miners!'

'As brave a victory as ever was gained,' said the old lawyer, warmly. 'I have heard enough to-day to teach even an old fellow like myself. They tell me that the public-house here is almost unvisited now, while I can recollect seeing and hearing in Bryn Arddail as much drunkenness and ribaldry as I have sometimes seen and heard in the lowest parts of Hammersmith—could I say more? Of course this change has not been accomplished by teaching alone, though Lindsey works so untiringly and prayerfully—the only way a man *can* work who aims for such high success—for example goes farther with such men as these than any teaching, and the life their rector lives among them is his best lesson. The brave and fearless way he shows them, by every act and word of his, what love he bears his Saviour, and the proud yet humble way he puts before all other thoughts the love his Saviour bears to us, has—well, has done its work. The men are led to see what is the truest manliness, as well as the purest religion; and I believe they love their young teacher with a little of such love as certain fishermen of old bore *their* young Teacher. No wonder either, since that manly love he seeks to win from them is for his Master, never for himself.'

'I see,' said Lilian, quietly; and I looked up into her eyes. Beautiful eyes they always were, but I fancied at that moment there was a new beauty in their long, long gaze upon the western sea.

'Is your friend a gentleman by birth?' inquired my lady.

'No——' Mr. Macan was smiling quizzically, for he knew most of Lady Carmichael's weaknesses. 'I don't think Lindsey's forbears were ever heard of. But never mind; the pew belonging to this house is a very snug one, my lady, and will encourage oblivion of Hugh's antecedents.'

'You mean,' said Lilian, turning gravely to look into the old lawyer's face, 'that we shall only think of what he tells us.'

'Do I?' smiled Mr. Macan, well pleased, as I could see, at the way our pet read his tone. 'Well, you know best, my dear. But, remember, I don't expect *you* to stay the year contentedly here.'

'I am very glad of the change and quiet,' she said, earnestly. 'I wish you would believe me.'

He must have believed such truthful eyes and lips; yet I could understand how hard it might be. She had come from London in the very height of the season, and was forfeiting gay and fashionable seasons elsewhere; she who in all society was so much sought after, flattered, admired,—ay, and even loved. Partly, of course, she owed her popularity to being sole heiress of her wealthy aunt and to her beauty; but it could never have

been what it was except for the bright, sweet, generous nature, which was almost like a magic spell about my darling girl.

It was a still September afternoon, and I, sitting alone on the step of that low French window where Lilian and I had sat so long on the evening of our arrival, and which had ever since been a favourite idling-place with us, was counting almost sorrowfully the three months which had sped from those twelve we were to spend at Bryn Arddail.

'Alone still!' exclaimed Lady Carmichael, coming up to me from the garden. 'Why, Stella, you are always alone now. Where is Lilian?'

'She went down to the church this afternoon, and I preferred staying here. She longed for the sound of the organ, she said, and would go and play for an hour.'

'And why not play here on her own piano? I do not like this new whim. It is unworthy of Lilian.'

'She likes so much to practise in the church,' I put in, quietly.

'If so, Stella, I must beg you to accompany her.'

I glanced wonderingly into my lady's face, the impatient tone of her voice was so new to me.

'Whether with us or not, Lady Carmichael,' I said, knowing how her darling's happiness had always been her first thought, 'Lilian enjoys every day she spends here. I think she likes Bryn Arddail better than any seaside place we ever visited; and what a healthy look this air has given her!'

'The *air* is well enough,' assented my lady, with cold emphasis.

'And,' I went on, impelled by some impulse I did not like following, 'she does not verify Mr. Macan's prediction. She does not miss the society to which she is accustomed.'

'I wish we had never come.'

The sharp, sudden speech greatly astonished me from the old lady, who had always been so tender and loving to my darling; and the words I had been going to utter died on my lips in my surprise and pain.

'Stella'—after our pause the impatient tone startled me—'does Mr. Lindsey know that Lilian is my heir; that her hand is sought by men of rank and wealth, and nearly promised to a man of title? If not, he must be told, and told at once.'

I stood quite still and could not answer. I was recalling a story which had once been whispered to Lilian and me, of Lady Carmichael's own youth—a sad and miserable little love story, which ended in a young man's broken heart and a girl's wealthy, loveless marriage. We had never doubted it,—indeed, I had felt that my lady's evident desire that Lilian should make her own choice unbiassed was an infallible proof of its truth; but now, quite suddenly, I doubted it all. I saw that Lilian's choice had been left free only because there had as yet been no opportunity

for her to make a choice to which her aunt could object ; and I saw that now, all the stronger from her previous surety, would be my lady's opposition. I recalled my three months' sojourn here in Bryn Arddail, and could not hide from myself the great change it had made in my pet ; and knowing the cause of the happiness that filled her heart to overflowing—how could I, loving her as I did, help but read her secret truly ?—I felt now how plainly other eyes might read it too.

Lady Carmichael roused herself suddenly from her silence, and spoke in an unwonted tone of authority.

'Mr. Lindsey must be told at once that Lilian, heiress as she is to great wealth, is about to make the finest match of the season. Mr. Macan ought to have done it, but, since he has not, you must, Stella.'

'I ! It would break my heart.'

The words faltered from my lips, in real terror of this task that she would give me.

'Why ?' she asked, watching me with stern intentness.

'I—I respect him so much, and ——'

'And what ?' inquired Lady Carmichael, when I stopped, trembling for what I had been going to say. 'When you respect him so much, and ——?'

'And love her so dearly.'

The words were said, but my courage broke down under Lady Carmichael's stern, unmoved gaze ; and I covered my face, and cried as if my heart were breaking. Somehow I seemed to see clearly now the trouble for my darling of which, even through all these bright, pleasant summer months, I had had a vague and dim foreshadowing.

'Dry your eyes,' said my lady, presently, with no softening of her voice ; 'I will do it myself. Dry your eyes, for here they are.'

They came up the little lawn together, Lilian nodding merrily when she saw us, and Mr. Lindsey raising his hat.

'I met Mr. Lindsey, auntie,' my darling said, hastening so unobtrusively up to us, 'and I asked him to come home with me. You told me long ago always to bring him when I could' (were the innocent words a cruel stab now ?), 'and especially when his own friend Mr. Macan is here.'

'We are ready for dinner, Lilian,' said Lady Carmichael, stiffly ; 'you had better go and change your dress. Mr. Macan will be here in half an hour.'

My pet smiled at me as she passed into the room, and I tried to return the smile, but my heart was too heavy.

The twilight of the September evening was creeping slowly and softly from the hills behind us, gliding westward, trailing its grey wings over that crimson line upon the sea, and softly spreading them before the glory of the setting sun. For a few minutes

we stood very silently together—we three—Hugh standing near me, with his hand among the red leaves of the creeper on the wall, and his eyes upon the glimpse of golden radiance still lingering in the west.

‘Lilian has been trying your organ again, I presume, Mr. Lindsey?’ So the words began at last, easy and commonplace, which were to end so cruelly. ‘She owes much to you for this opportunity of practising. Has she told you why the organ is her favourite instrument just now?’

There was a little flush of colour on his face, but so slight that it might have been only a faint reflection of the soft red leaves beside him.

‘No; she has not told me, Lady Carmichael.’

‘Then I think I will,’ she said; and even into *her* face the colour mounted as she spoke. ‘The gentleman whom she will marry soon after our return home, a young nobleman possessing every quality likely to charm a girl of Lilian’s temperament and education, is himself a proficient on the organ, and he has a very fine instrument in each of his houses. Lilian never speaks of her admirer, I know,’ continued my lady, in a tone of gracious confidence, ‘but I think she will not be angry with me for mentioning what must soon be generally known. Of course, we all understand, do we not, Mr. Lindsey? that one so pretty and attractive as Lilian, being also heiress to a great fortune, would naturally marry into the highest ranks.’

My heart beat angrily at this question being put to him; but he did not answer it, nor did he bring his eyes back from their distant gaze.

‘My own life being so uncertain,’ Lady Carmichael went on, ‘I am, very naturally, you will own, anxious to see my child married, and am well content to think her husband will be a man whose wealth and natural gifts are as great as her own. He has loved her for years, and had my full consent from the first.’

A long pause then, and still he did not speak. Did it strike her, as it struck me, how little *he* was one to understand this great advantage of adding wealth to wealth—he who took no thought of these things, but felt that his heavenly Father knew what he had need of?

‘So you see, Mr. Lindsey,’ my lady added, lightly; though I, knowing her so well, could detect that in spite of her coldness she was ill at ease; ‘I have quite understood this new whim of hers for practising the organ in your church. I ought to thank you for making arrangements for her to do so. And by-the-way, speaking of yourself, really I think you ought to try for promotion. So many talents as you possess are literally wasted here.’

I rose hurriedly; even on the chance of incurring my lady’s displeasure; I could not stay to see Hugh Lindsey’s white, still face. How could she dare to add those words to him, who, like

the wise king of old, would not ask riches or wealth or honour for himself?

To me that seemed a most unhappy evening, though Mr. Macan was gay and genial as usual, and though Lilian exerted herself so brightly for everyone's pleasure and enjoyment. For months afterwards I was to be haunted by the remembrance of her beautiful, glad face, as she moved among us; restless, but restless only in intense happiness, thoughtful for each of us; and so bent upon making the evening a pleasant evening to all that I was not the only one who watched her with a wondering admiration.

We were standing at the fire, about to separate (we were not used to the keenness of the Bryn Arddail air, and so we liked to have fires on these September nights), and Lilian was chatting gaily with Mr. Macan about her old friends, when the subject was introduced which I had all the evening dreaded. Ah! so well I remember the smile with which she was speaking, when my lady's words stopped her, and killed that smile in an instant.

'Do you not see, Mr. Macan, that it is Lord Glynn of whom Lilian is really longing to hear? Then she will tell you how industriously she is practising the organ here, that she may astonish and please him when she returns. Even in our exile, he must be first in her thoughts.'

The old lawyer was gazing curiously into my darling's face, and he answered, rather curtly, after his pause:

'I've talked enough for to-night. Going, Lindsey? I will walk down the garden with you. I'm heartily sorry not to find you looking better. As I tried to tell you once before to-night, you want a change. Don't you think you might arrange a temporary exchange with some clergyman whose work is more of a sinecure? You look to need a rest.'

'I have for some time,' was the quiet reply, 'been trying to effect an exchange.'

'For some time! Why, you surely did not want to leave Bryn Arddail in the summer?'

'Yes; I felt it would be best.'

'I could not raise my eyes. I dared not meet him, after having been present at that interview, which now I saw (as Lady Carmichael, too, must see) had been an unnecessary cruelty. He had, before that, determined to go away. The struggle of this summer would end bravely, after all, and he had *meant* it to end bravely, even before she had spoken those heartless words this evening.'

'It will do you good, I'm sure,' said Mr. Macan, his genial tones breaking our pause, 'and I will bear it in mind. The only question is, what will Bryn Arddail do without you?'

Without answering this, Mr. Lindsey bade us all good night. His last hand-clasp was for Lilian; and then I looked at her, for

the first time since she had been smiling and chatting with her old friend. Oh, the terrible wondering sadness in her face now—the shadow of a great sorrow which she could not yet comprehend!

As soon as Mr. Macan departed with Hugh Lindsey, as he had said he would, my lady rose to go to her room, wishing, as I could see, to avoid Lilian.

All that night I lay awake, thinking of my pet in this her first sorrow, and longing that I could bear it for her—longing *selfishly*, I know, for to myself the pain of seeing her suffer was greater than that of suffering myself alone. Several times I crept to the door of her room, hoping she would let me in; but it was always locked, and at last I gave up trying to disturb her. But, when I knocked at her door in the early morning, she admitted me without a word. For her the night had been a season of wakeful misery. I saw this in her pale, sad face, and the tears rushed to my eyes as I opened my arms and called her by one sweet pet name which belonged to her childhood.

‘Stella,’ she sobbed, hiding her face upon my breast, ‘I could not help it. I never guessed that as I grew to know him I *must* grow to love him. Oh, my dear, I could not help it!’

My own heart was too heavy to give comfort. I could only hold her to me, as I used to do in those childish days whose spirit seemed to have come back to her this morning, for I knew the truth of those few sad words of hers. Knowing him as she had learned to know him, how could she help but love him?

We never now heard Lilian’s glad voice singing about the house, and I grew almost to forget the very sound of her sweet laughter; yet she tried hard to hide this change. Indeed, I think the struggle that she made to hide it was the most pitiful of all to see. I wished in my heart that the year which we were to spend in Bryn Arddail was over, or that Lady Carmichael would shorten it, out of pity for Lilian. Happily as it had begun, it was full of misery now for three of us. As for my lady, though the air had given her strength and vigour, it seemed to have changed *her* most of all. She had moods now which we could not understand. Sometimes, noticing Lilian’s drooping quietness, she would try impatiently and fretfully to arouse her, while at other times should we seem to be unaware even of her presence. Sometimes, when Lilian, making a great effort, would chat brightly to us, my lady would grow moody and absent, while at other times she would rebuke her pettishly. If I spoke to her of Lilian, she would sometimes listen almost eagerly, while at others she would stop me with real anger, saying the girl was obstinate and self-willed, and she did not care to hear her name so often. Lilian herself was far, far more patient than I was with her aunt’s variable moods, and, if I spoke of them, she only sighed

and said it was her fault. To Mr. Lindsey, whom we saw but seldom now, my lady was formally and very coldly polite. Now that she knew he was to leave Bryn Arddail as soon as he could, she was satisfied.

I often wondered whether Mr. Macan grieved over the change in his old friend and client. Never before had she been eccentric, or either cold and changeable, and now she was all. Another change I noticed, too. Though she had regained her health, she would speak often of what I had never heard her discuss before—the responsibility of her wealth, and the probability of her death.

‘Hush, auntie!’ Lilian used to whisper, with her long, sweet kiss. ‘Think how it pains us. Would you like *me* so often to talk of dying?’

‘Childish nonsense!’ my lady would interrupt, with a sudden change to anger. But after such an interruption I used to notice how her eyes would rest (whenever they could do so unobserved, as she thought) on Lilian’s patient face; and sometimes a great sternness would gather on her brow, and sometimes a yearning pity.

It was in the early light of an October day that Hugh came at last to bid us good-bye. I was sitting alone in the drawing-room when he entered, not after rapping at the window as he used to do, but ushered formally in. I met him as frankly and cordially as I had always done, rejoicing that Mr. Macan happened to be with us. This would be a sad good-bye for Lilian, and the old lawyer’s genial presence would perhaps make it a little less so.

We stood together for some little time, talking. He told me that he had not been able to effect an exchange, but had engaged a curate for the charge of Bryn Arddail while he should be away. That was all he said, but I knew he would not return until Lady Carmichael’s household had left. I spoke very little, because I could not speak cheerily; then I went to tell them he was here. Lady Carmichael and her lawyer were together in the library, she dictating to him while he wrote. He put down his pen and came to meet me with a smile, and so I told my message to him instead of to my lady, but she answered testily, from the table where she sat:

‘Tell Mr. Lindsey that I and Mr. Macan are particularly engaged just now; but as of course we wish to bid him good-bye, ask him to stay and dine with us.’

‘And if he hesitates,’ put in the old lawyer, ‘tell him I want his assistance in a legal matter this evening, and that he will particularly oblige me by giving the time. You young people can very well amuse each other for the hour that remains before dinner.’

I gave these messages to Mr. Lindsey first, then went on to the morning-room to find Lilian. She was playing softly to herself when I came in, and, though she turned and smiled at me, she did not cease playing.

'Lilian dear,' I said, taking her wistful face between my hands as I whispered the words, 'Mr. Lindsey is here waiting to see you. He is going away for a little time.'

'Going away!' she echoed, raising both hands to her head, with a gesture of pain that was sad to see. 'Going away! Oh, yes, he said that he was going. I remember. He—he was *anxious* to go. Why have you fetched me? What have I to say?'

'Only good-bye,' I answered, sorrowfully. 'It is all that any of us can say to him now, my darling.'

'Yes, any of us,' she murmured, rising wearily. 'We have all the same to say to him, and he has the same to say to all of us. Come, Stella.'

I think it was a great relief to us all when dinner was over that evening, for no one but Mr. Macan seemed to have a cheerful word to say. Lilian pleaded a headache in excuse for her pale face, but Mr. Lindsey made no excuse at all for his.

'I want to ask you, Lindsey,' said Mr. Macan, when he saw my lady rise, 'if you will act as witness for me to-night, with one of these young ladies. Lady Carmichael has summoned me here to make her will, and I would rather find the two signatures I want among yourselves than among the servants. Yours and Miss Lilian's will do nicely. Lady Carmichael, if you will allow me, I will bring the will into the drawing-room now. We do not wish to stay here, do we, Lindsey?'

Mr. Lindsey followed us at once, and Mr. Macan came in from the library a few minutes afterwards, with an open sheet of paper in his hand.

'You really wish,' he asked, turning gently to my lady, as she sat in her large chair beside the fire, 'that I should read this aloud, before I obtain the necessary signatures?'

'I really wish it,' she answered, with slow clearness. 'They should know exactly what they sign.'

So the old lawyer began to read his client's will, and we sat listening; Lilian beside her aunt, in a shrinking attitude which had never belonged to her before; and Hugh opposite, his eyes upon the ground, and his firm lips trembling a little as the lawyer read. I only remember in what mute and wondering surprise I sat to hear my lady's will. *Could* the words be read aright? Could she, who had always been so kind and generous to us all—so wondrously kind and generous to her pet, really have willed from her every farthing of the wealth which she had taught her to look upon as already hers?

Though I suppose I heard the names of the charities to which Lady Carmichael bequeathed her property, my thoughts were wandering far enough away from them, and it was only when Lilian's name was read at last that I again, by an effort, fixed my attention. If Lady Carmichael's whole fortune were (as decreed in the beginning of the will) to be divided among certain



charities, why should Lilian's name be mentioned at all? I listened eagerly then, and though there was very little to hear of Lilian, that surprised me most of all. The property had been thus willed—so the words went, as far as I could understand—by the testatrix, *for conscience' sake*. Her niece, Lilian Lee, would understand this, and would no doubt marry during her aunt's lifetime. But, if not, she would find little difficulty in gaining her own livelihood.

This was all I could understand of the strange will which Mr. Macan read to us, and then placed on the table before Lady Carmichael. She took a pen in her hand, then looked across at Lilian and Hugh Lindsey. His face was very pale and full of anxiety, yet there shone in his eyes a restless brilliance which had chased away the patient hopelessness of an hour before.

'Now, Lindsey, you and Miss Lee are to witness the signature.'

'You wish me to sign, Lady Carmichael?'

'Yes; and you, Lilian. Your signatures will do as well as any others, for you have neither of you any interest in the will. Do you, either of you, object to doing this?'

The question was sharp and suspicious, and seemed even more addressed to Lilian than to Mr. Lindsey.

'Object! oh no,' she said, though I had seen how marvellously the will had astonished her. 'You think it right, auntie. You say it is *for conscience' sake*, and you know best. I am quite ready to sign, Mr. Macan.'

And so they wrote their names upon this will, while I mused of the old love story, doubting it entirely now, because surely, if it were true, its memory could never have allowed this act.

As soon as the will was signed, Mr. Macan left the room with it in his hand, and Lady Carmichael rose at once to follow him. Then, quite suddenly, Hugh stepped before her and entreated her to listen to him for a moment. In a few words, so heart-felt that they sounded very solemn, he told her of his love for Lilian—a love he could not lose, though he had tried hard to hide it. He told her that he would never have spoken of it, either to her or to Lilian herself, but for having heard that will which she herself had dictated.

'You speak there of Miss Lee earning her own livelihood,' he said, his voice moved and shaken. 'Lady Carmichael, let me offer it to her. Give me leave now to offer her the love which I have tried in vain to conquer, but which masters me this moment in all its strength, and—at last—in hope.'

With just a passing glance at Lilian, my lady asked one simple question: 'Lilian, how am I to answer this?' Then I slipped away, for I loved them both too well to stay to hear more, because I felt it would all be happiness.

I sat alone in my own quiet room for a long time after that,

and when I came down at last, and met Lady Carmichael crossing the hall to the library, I saw that her eyes were wet with tears.

'Stella, Stella,' whispered Lilian, drawing me again into the lighted drawing-room; 'oh, my dear, kiss me in my great happiness, and tell me you are glad!'

But, though she had asked me to say it, she did not hear it, I am sure; for she hid her face upon my shoulder, sobbing in the very intensity of her joy.

When we went in to say good night to my lady, she took Lilian's face between her hands, and looked down into the truthful, happy eyes.

'Then you are not fretting for the loss of your wealth?'

'Auntie,' my pet whispered, softly, 'what I have won is so much greater wealth.'

And Mr. Macan, from his seat at the writing-table, seemed to answer her in his merry glance.

'Good night,' said my lady, with her last kiss. 'Don't take Stella. She can wait with us. When you are not present, we can be sure of her sitting silent.'

So I sat by the fire, thinking, while Mr. Macan wrote on; Lady Carmichael now and then talking to him in a low tone, and now and then writing herself, or reading what he had written.

'I have finished,' he said at last, and taking a cigar went out to smoke.

Then Lady Carmichael took up the folded will, and opened and glanced through it.

'Did you quite understand this when it was read, Stella?'

'Quite.'

'Did Mr. Lindsey?'

'Yes, I am sure he did.'

'And Lilian?'

'Oh, yes.'

'That is right. Now read it through yourself aloud to me.'

It was not a very easy task, but I managed to get through it without incurring my lady's displeasure, and the bequests were a little plainer to me now.

'You see that none of you are remembered?' she said, as I handed the folded paper back to her.

'Yes, my lady.'

'You feel sure that Lilian understood that?'

'Quite sure.'

'I need not ask you of Hugh Lindsey; I know *he* understood. Now you may go.'

It was Christmas morning, and though there was no keen, bright Christmas frost upon the grass and brown hedgerows, and though there was no bright, uncertain Christmas sunshine on the

restless sea, yet in every village household at Bryn Arddail there gleamed the real brightness of the season.

What wonder was it that, when Lilian and I carried our Christmas gifts to these little homes upon the cliffs, and heard whose lessons and whose visits had left peace and happiness in each, Lilian's face should grow so bright with full content? For of course Hugh Lindsey had never left Bryn Arddail, after all; no, though Mr. Macan was so fond of gravely and continually bringing him the name of some imaginary clergyman who was anxious to effect an exchange with him.

It was Christmas morning, as I said, and we were together in our pleasant breakfast-room. Not only Lady Carmichael and Lilian and I, but Mr. Lindsey, who had been breakfasting with us, and Mr. Macan, who had come to spend Christmas with us, and whose fault it chiefly was that we had so many gifts and tales to linger over.

The low windows, at which we had loved to sit in the summer-time, were closed fast now, and it was around the blazing Christmas fire that we chatted with light hearts and happy faces.

'This is a curious little present,' said Hugh, taking a key from the parcel in which he had found it among those addressed to himself. 'Is it to allow me access to one of your strong boxes, Mr. Macan?'

'The box which *that* opens,' returned the generous old lawyer, drily, 'will not arrive at the rectory until your marriage-day, so you see how needful it will be for me to have timely notice. Lilian, you must expect plenty of presents soon, my dear—not Christmas ones—for I have been obliged at last to tell the world of your engagement.'

'Why?' asked Lilian, blushing brightly.

'For this reason. A certain friend of yours told me a few days ago he was tired of waiting for your return, and was coming down here to urge his suit once more in person, and offer you again the love and the wealth and the title and—the organs, which you have never hitherto appreciated. There was only one way by which I could save this unnecessary pain for either you or him, so I told him of your engagement. And, having told *him*, I consider I have told the world.'

Hugh was looking into my darling's face with an eager questioning in his eyes, and she answered the look. From that moment how could anyone of us doubt how wholly and entirely her heart was his?

'I did right, I see,' replied Mr. Macan, genially; 'I generally do. Lady Carmichael, have you no word of admiration for my wise conduct of affairs?'

My lady was unfolding then the little gift that Lilian and I had prepared for her with so much love, and, when she looked up from it, her eyes were wet behind their glasses.

'Lilian,' she said, after answering her old friend's question only with an absent smile, 'my presents to you are very simple ones, as you see; but you understand why, because you remember how my money is devoted in my will.'

'We remember, auntie,' Lilian answered, taking into hers one of my dear old lady's trembling hands.

'Do you remember, Hugh?' asked Lady Carmichael, turning rather wistfully to him.

'Could I forget that happy night?' said Hugh, gently.

'Though you say you remember,' she went on, leaning with one hand upon the breakfast table, while Lilian held the other, 'I want you to hear that will again. Hugh, will you read it to us this time? Mr. Macan, please to give it to him.'

Quite steadily and calmly Hugh read through the will which Mr. Macan had read to us that night two months before, and which so sternly devoted to other purposes the wealth which was to have been Lilian's; and once or twice, while he read, Lilian herself bent and smiled into my lady's eyes, though, through all, I fancied I could read a new momentary disappointment in hers. Perhaps she was dreaming of what Hugh might do with only a little of these riches.

'You quite understand it?' questioned my lady, holding her hand for the will when Hugh had finished.

And we all answered, without hesitation, that we quite understood.

'You bear me no ill-will for this?'

And Lilian was the first to answer with the warm denial.

'Then,' said my lady, smiling just as she used to smile years ago, when we two orphan girls had learned to love her so dearly; 'you will understand the end?' She had not loosed Lilian's hand, but crossing the rug, she dropped the folded will into the heart of the blazing Christmas fire, and stood quietly there, watching it burn to ashes.

'Hugh,' she said then, still with her eyes upon the fire, 'before I knew you, save as the poorly paid clergyman of this poor parish, I saw that you loved my child, and the thought angered me beyond all words. I fancied that I could put a stop to this love, and I tried. I told you what other destiny awaited her, and how impossible it would be for her to wed but with rank and wealth. But I saw that my words could only put a stop to your hope and happiness—never to your love. You were true and honourable, and held aloof. Then my punishment came in witnessing Lilian's quiet pain. I had put an end to *her* hope and happiness too, but could put no end to *her* love either.

'So dearly I loved her, that this punishment grew at last unbearable; and I wondered how I could undo the misery I had wrought, while at the same time I could beyond a doubt

prove your love to be—what I *have* proved it. I thought of a plan at last, and my old friend and yours has helped me.

‘When Lilian was a penniless girl, you had the courage to offer her the heart she prized ; and I heard the frank and simple truth from both. I was satisfied then that this was a love to last till death, and to be a blessing, not only to you both, but to others too. How much more am I satisfied now that I have learned to love you for your own sake, as well as for my child’s ! I have not taken all this time to discover what a wise choice she made, Hugh, though I have never told you so before this happy Christmas morning. There ! I have tried you both. Lilian darling, see, there are only ashes left of my old will. That is my Christmas present to you both—to you all indeed, though you will not understand quite yet. And one of my brightest memories is that the love you bore your old aunt has never failed for this unloving deed, but has been true and kind through all. Mr. Macan has another will of mine, which you will some day hear him read ; and when *that* was written, Lilian darling, I remembered my own youth, and the one chance of happiness which I—threw away.’

The faltering voice failed here, and I crept to my dear old lady’s side.

‘Auntie,’ cried Lilian, with her gentle, clinging caress, ‘you have always been so kind to me—to all—so good, so good !’

And Hugh raised her hand reverently to his lips.

## ON THE LINE.

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IT was part of my duty, as junior clerk in the provincial bank of Littleborough, to go once a week to open the branch bank at Merric ; so every Thursday, which was the market day there, I took from our parent bank some thousands of pounds in my black bag, and in the same way brought back the deposits at night.

At first I used to be very nervous and anxious on my journey, especially on dark winter evenings ; but I had grown at last so accustomed to the line, so familiar with every station, and even every official, between Littleborough and Merric, that I had, as it were, outgrown my timidity, and, though cautious as ever, and still perpetually on the watch, I managed to enjoy my day, and make the most of any little pleasure and diversion that came in my way ; for there is always some little amusement to be found between Dan and Beersheba to those who are not determined to pronounce all barren.

It was a bitter February evening, and I was wrapped to the ears in coats and comforters, as I hurried into the Merric station with nine thousand pounds (chiefly in gold) safe in my black bag, my bag safe in my hand, and the key of it safe in my pocket. I entered the refreshment-room, and in a pleasant tone of patronage requested a golden-haired young lady to prepare me a fortification against the inner cold. She was standing opposite me, smiling and joking, while I drank it, when a light young voice beside me said, suddenly,

‘I will take just such another glass, if you please. I have to go on to Littleborough by the next train, and there is every prospect of my being found frozen without some preventative of this kind.’

I do not know how it came about, but when the empty glasses were deposited on the counter and the comforters readjusted, we were chatting, and we naturally turned out of the room together

He had a little valise with him, which I noticed he had never put out of his hand, and of which he seemed to take especial care ; so it may have been a fellow-feeling which made us friendly.

As the train came in, he looked down at his valise, and said to me, with pleasant frankness,

‘I must be particular in choosing my seat, for I have property here which I dare not lose sight of.’

I smiled, but my old caution was too deeply rooted for me to return his confidence.

‘I would rather choose an empty carriage, I think,’ he went on ; ‘it is generally safest when one carries valuable luggage. I have notes and papers here, do you know, my dear fellow, worth many thousands. Since I left Glasgow with them, a week ago, I have kept them under my eye night and day, and shall do so until I deposit them with the firm to-morrow. One is obliged to be so very suspicious when one travels for such a firm as ours. Do you know Glasgow at all?’

‘Not at all. The train has stopped down there. Let us go at once.’

‘You go, if you will,’ said he, raising his eyebrows as he expressively touched his valise ; ‘but I am unwilling—in fact, my dear fellow, I dare not. I always make a rule of waiting until other passengers are in ; then I can choose my companions, instead of my companions choosing me, which does not suit me while I bear this heavy responsibility. You, I see, are not so timid, but I always feel one cannot be too careful. It is so useless to lock the stable door after the steed is stolen, and so very desirable to do so before that event takes place.’

While he talked, instead of hastening to our seat, we sauntered up, just as the other passengers were settling themselves in their places, and looked into each carriage as we passed—at least, my companion did, while I admired the cool, polite way in which he did it, when it was evident to me all the time how keenly observant he was.

At last he turned, and whispered to me,

‘A widow in the very deepest weeds and woe is not a lively companion, but a peculiarly safe one on an occasion like this. Will you venture, or shall you try to——’

‘Make haste ! I am coming,’ said I, following him, as the guard came up.

‘That’s right,’ he muttered, as he laid his valise on the seat beside him. ‘I am such an inveterately anxious fellow in travelling, that I am even anxious not to lose my companion. I feel safer when with some one who is, like myself, responsible for much.’

Before I had time to ask how he knew I was responsible for much—though I easily understood how he could guess it—he turned with gentle courtesy to our fellow-traveller.

‘A bitter night, ma’am, is it not? You are going on to Littleborough, I hope, as we are; and I hope, too, that no one will disturb us between now and then.’

While he spoke, I had time to notice her, though a thick widow’s veil hid her features and complexion so entirely that all I could discover was that she was young, and had a quantity of short, fair hair low upon her forehead. She seemed tall, too; but was so silent and sad that whether she was agreeable or otherwise I had no chance of judging. It did not signify much, for my new acquaintance—whose name, as he candidly showed me on the address of his valise, was Donald Fraser—talked enough for us all; and was very amusing, and shortened the way so much that I was astonished when the train stopped at Wynn, the last station at which it would stop before Littleborough. Fraser looked out, and hailed the guard.

‘How long do we wait here?’

‘About five minutes. The up express passes us here.’

Fraser looked in again; at me; at his luggage; at the lady beside us; at his valise again; then rose and hesitated.

‘I must have a brisk walk up and down for these few minutes,’ he said, ‘or I shall be petrified here. There’s not a soul getting out or in. Will you come, sir?’ I wavered. ‘I know,’ he said, bowing politely to the widow lady, ‘that I may leave my luggage in your care for three minutes. It is almost as if I left my life in your hands—which, indeed, I could scarcely hesitate to do. You have no luggage of your own, I remark, to encumber you. Will you be so very kind as to take charge of mine? This gentleman, perhaps will display a similar confidence, where, I am sure, it can safely be displayed.’

I should have blushed with shame to do otherwise, when she bowed so graciously. I smiled and said a few common-place words, not very suitable to the occasion, I daresay, and followed Fraser, not over-willingly, until he whispered, confidentially, as he took my arm,

‘You see, my dear fellow, she is a lady, and a trustworthy lady; but I am so cautious, that even that alone will not satisfy me. Don’t you see, we can keep the carriage in sight while we walk a little life into our limbs. No one is about, and it is all as clear as daylight.’

So we walked up and down the long platform, each taking a light, and enjoying a quiet pull. No one was about, as he had said, for those few minutes; and as the express dashed passed we simultaneously made a rush at our carriage. I felt that I had kept my eyes upon it all the time, so I went to it, as I thought, and jumped in. Fraser closely followed me as the engine shrieked. The porter ran along after us, and we were off.

‘Good heavens!’ I ejaculated, looking round in blank bewilderment; ‘the wrong carriage!’



Fraser was wringing his hands opposite me.

'What shall we do?' was all he could say. 'What shall we do?'

Even then, in all my anxiety, I was rather ashamed of the dismay in our faces, and the helplessness of our position, before the gentleman who was in the carriage; a small, dark-haired clergyman, in a suit of glossy black, with a spotless white tie.

You will think we are mad, sir,' said Fraser, changing his tone, as his thoughts apparently followed mine; but the fact is——' And he told him the fact, not too concisely.

'It is awkward, certainly,' said the gentleman, looking at us both with quiet interest; 'but you will pardon me if I say I think it is more awkward for the lady than for yourselves. How troubled she will be with the charge of so much valuable property! She may consider her life is scarcely safe. Do you think anyone got into her carriage at Wynn?'

'Certainly not; I could swear it,' I answered, impetuously.

'Then, so far as you are concerned,' he said, gently, to us both, 'it is all right; for we do not stop again, and so no one can appropriate your possessions.'

Hardly did this clear, natural view of the case satisfy us, though it had more weight with me than with Fraser.

'Let me advise one of you,' continued our sympathetic little fellow-passenger, 'to watch the carriages as we stop at Littleborough, and jump out at once, one going to the carriage in front, and the other to that in the rear. Your old seats must surely have been no farther away than that.'

'Surely,' said I; 'and what a blundering idiot I was to mistake them!'

'A rather usual and natural mistake,' he answered, kindly. 'I have done it myself more than once. I could not well do it to-day, though, for I have this hamper with me; and it would soon identify my carriage, would it not? Is it in your way at all? If so, pray push it under the seat. It ought properly to be in the van; but I was late, and brought it in with me as being the quicker plan.'

I grew almost cheerful on the way, and laid aside the remembrance of our missing luggage; but Fraser seemed unable to do so.

We had given up our tickets at Wynn, and as the train slackened speed for Littleborough Fraser took out his key, and, before the train had well stopped, we were both out. To the right I went; to the left Fraser; and two minutes afterwards we met, with a grave, blank look into each other's face. Without speaking, I passed him and took up my position at the door of exit. No one had passed out of the station. I saw the whole yard of it in the gaslight, bare and empty. But what a fool I was to imagine such a thing, when we had seen every carriage before an occupant had left it!

'What on earth does it mean?' I gasped, clutching Fraser by the arm as he joined me, and still gazing into every face that passed me, as if my search in the glare of light were a vague dream. 'Where is she?'

'Then you have not seen her?' he whispered, breathlessly. 'I believe I am going mad!' And then he fell back to his old wail of, 'What shall we do? What can we do?'

I made inquiries of the guard as calmly as I could. Yes, he had taken a ticket from a lady in black at Wynn. Had she not been in the same carriage with myself? He had not noticed whether she left the train there or here. The little clergyman came up as I spoke, a porter behind carrying the hamper.

'This is most unaccountable, sir,' he said, offering me his hand. 'Had you not better telegraph back to Wynn, and all along the line? I am so very sorry for this sad termination to your journey, and especially for your friend, who seems quite bowed down.'

I shook his hand without answering.

'You will telegraph?' he questioned.

'We shall do all that can be done. Good night,' I said; and when he had called a cab, and taken himself and his hamper off, I missed his sympathy and encouragement.

Fraser and I left no stone unturned. We telegraphed to every station, but the answers were all unsatisfactory; no widow lady had left that train at any station; and so we came to a standstill. The porters had let out no lady in black at Littleborough, they could swear; but that we knew before. What could we do now? We separated in a miserable, despairing way; and I went at once to the bank, and reported myself to the senior clerk, who lived on the premises. He could make nothing of my story—as who could have done?—and looked so grave and troubled that it gave me a foretaste of what the interviews that followed would be. That whole night he and I and Fraser, as well as a detective, whom we left behind us at Wynn, spent between the two towns; but we met with no success, and the next day came my summons to the presence of the assembled partners. I told my story as simply as I could; and Fraser, who was with me, and in the direst distress, added his own experience. They questioned him minutely and rather sternly, as they questioned me. Then—I do not know how it happened, or where it began, or who first wore that look upon his face which I afterwards saw upon all—but gradually there dawned a new motive in the questioning. I felt it with a strange, proud hopelessness; which angered me less because I had known it would come. It was natural that a shadow of suspicion—perhaps more than a shadow—should fall upon myself. With that improbable story for all my plea, it was no wonder that they looked strangely and dubiously upon me. They repeated once more the question which everybody had asked me since the detective began it—

'Had the lady no luggage of her own?'

'To the best of my recollection, no,' I said, turning to Fraser.

'No,' he answered, feeling himself appealed to; 'none at all.' He had noticed it, he said, and, if I recollected, remarked upon it to her when he had left his own with her.

'And do you mean to tell me,' said the senior partner, sternly, 'that she could have left the train—with your bag and the valise belonging to this gentleman in her hand—and yet no one have seen her? It is the wildest and most improbable story I ever heard.'

'I know it is,' I answered; 'more wild and improbable to myself, gentlemen, than even to you.'

'I don't see that, interrupted another partner, coldly; 'but further questioning seems useless.'

'Did the train stop or slacken speed at all on the line between Wynn station and Littleborough?' asked the senior partner once more.

'Not once, sir.'

'Your property was not in gold, I believe?' he asked, turning suddenly upon Fraser.

'The papers were the most valuable part of mine,' he answered, dejectedly. 'They were notes to a considerable amount, and gold, and—my own purse.'

'May I ask to what house you belong?' he was next asked. Politely and readily Fraser named a well-known Glasgow firm.

'And now,' said he, with his old candour, 'that every wheel is in motion for recovery, I shall go back at once, to confess what a blind idiot I have been.'

'Everything is done that can be done, I believe,' said the head of the firm, in his most austere tone. 'The detectives are at work, and there is notice of the robbery everywhere by this time. You' (to me) 'will be excused to-day, as you have been up all night. Good morning.' And I felt most emphatically that his back was turned upon me.

'I shall be off by the next train,' said Fraser, as we walked together from the bank. 'Good-bye. I hope we shall meet again when this black mystery is cleared.'

'If it ever is cleared,' I answered, not very cheerfully as I shook him by the hand, sorry to lose him now, when everything was so cold and gloomy around me. 'I am very hopeless about it; it was so cleverly done, and baffles me so entirely.'

'My situation is as good as gone,' Fraser said, 'and I am already penniless and characterless.'

Poor fellow! I could hardly bear to look into his miserable face. I made him take the half of what I had in my own pocket; and then I went slowly to my solitary lodging, feeling that I, too, should soon find my situation gone, and feel myself penniless and characterless.

The next few days passed in restless excitement. Not the faintest possible clue was obtainable. Our money and poor Fraser's papers were gone beyond recall, as it seemed ; and the widow lady in whose charge they had been left, had vanished so strangely that indeed it was but natural my story should be looked upon as a lie. The chilling reserve of my employers, the half-hidden suspicion of the senior clerks, and worst of all, the pitying friendliness of my one subordinate crushed me utterly. I lost all my spirit, and my nights were restless and unrefreshing ; but I kept up as manfully as I could, thinking each day that perhaps it would be cleared, as such things often were. Time went on, and brought not even a glimmer of light upon the subject, until at last, one spring evening, I crept home from the bank through the sunny streets, wondering why my temples should throb so strangely and my hands be hot.

'I am too tired to care for my dinner,' I said, as it was taken away untasted ; and I went to bed, that I might rest and be ready for work in the morning. I have a vague remembrance of getting up with a fear that I might be late ; of dressing with hands that felt like some one else's, and tottering to the bank.

'What on earth is the matter ?' asked the senior clerk.

'I thought I was late, sir, and I have hurried, and tired myself.'

I remember the question, and the astonished look with which it was accompanied ; I remember my answer as I held my head in my hands over the desk, but I remember little of the weary weeks that followed, except their ceaseless pain, until the day when I sat up again, looking out upon the dusty street, and talking, in faint, broken sentences, to our manager. Ours ! The word was a mockery even then.

'I have thought it over, sir, quietly, before my illness, when the illness was coming, and I would rather resign my situation ; I know it is better.'

'Then, as I say,' he answered, slowly, 'if you really yourself feel it is better, I do not mind owning that I think so too. You will, in fact, be more comfortable elsewhere ; the gentlemen are all sorry, and will do what they can to get you another appointment ; they, too, think it will perhaps be better for you to leave the bank. Not that I was to tell you—they did not wish me to mention it, unless you did so first yourself. You are tired now, are you not ?'

'Rather. I am but a poor, weak fellow yet. Will you thank the gentlemen for their kindness during my illness, and take them—with my thanks—my resignation ?'

He left me then, and looking down into the dusty street again, I seemed to see myself, a footsore, lonely figure, toiling on, avoided tacitly by other busy passengers, chilled and tired, though so short a distance lay behind me. And, looking on him

so, the heavy tears came and blotted out the hot and dusty road that lay before me.

After my decision was once made, I tried to lay aside all gloomy thoughts, knowing they would but delay my recovery, which was a very slow one, perhaps because the only companions I had were these harassing and anxious thoughts. When I was able to walk again, I called, by appointment, on the senior partner of the Littleborough bank. He was generous and cordial to me, and told me—as if he were glad to tell me—that he was able to obtain for me, if I wished it, a good appointment on the line. I did wish it, as you may be sure, when I found I was considered competent to fill it.

‘I am glad you accept it,’ he said, heartily; ‘and I hope you will be successful. Now, take another glass of wine; you look as if you might drink it by the bottle. Let me hear how you get on.’

We parted, without a word of the robbery having been spoken between us; and in a few days I bade good-bye to Littleborough, and turned to my new life. It was a very pleasant one, and for years I have been thankful to think how soon I learned to enjoy my work. That fellow-feeling with poor Fraser, which had lain dormant so long, prompted me now to write to him, and tell him how things had turned out for me, sending my address. This letter I enclosed with one to the firm in Glasgow, begging them, if he were not with them still, and they knew where he was, to forward it. The reply astonished me. They had never known a Mr. Donald Fraser; certainly they had never had a clerk in their employ bearing that name, nor were they connected in any way with the robbery I had mentioned. From that moment the circumstances of that robbery seemed only more inexplicable than ever. That Fraser was connected with them, I then felt no doubt. But how? That question baffled me at every turn: for had he not been with me all the time, and even through the night and part of the day following? Yet that he was connected with the robbery I now knew. Should I ever solve the strange problem?

I had been a long time in my new situation, when one day I found myself at the Euston Station when the auction of unclaimed luggage was being held. I stood to watch the sale until my train should start. Lazily and unconcernedly I saw the different articles put up, until one suddenly excited my curiosity. A black bag, so like my own old one, that involuntarily I put my hand into my pocket to feel if the key were on my bunch. Yes, there it was, and I could soon prove if it were mine, by looking inside, for there was an inkstain in the corner to which I could swear. I bid for it desperately, though it was so like hundreds of other bags that it was but a chance after all. It was knocked down to me, and with trembling hands I seized it, took my seat

in the train, and caught myself travelling with something like my old anxiety vested in the bag beside me. I carried it into my room, and took out the key. It slipped easily and naturally into the lock, and the bag opened with a queer familiarity. No, not mine, of course; it was full of a lady's things. I tossed them out, and looked down into the corner. Yes, there was the ink-blot, the old black saturation, on the lining, and I could swear to the bag before any court in Europe. What were these things? Would they give me any clue to the puzzle over which I was perpetually striving? I took them up one by one—they were but three in all; but they told a story which needed no farther evidence. First a widow's bonnet, flattened and damaged, certainly, but recognizable; then a long skirt of heavy black stuff; and lastly a shawl of what seemed the same. There they were, and I recognized them all as having been worn by my fellow-traveller between Merric and Wynn on the night of the robbery. I spread them out, and sat down to think and make it as clear as possible. That this was a disguise, there could be no doubt. She had dropped it, of course, and so escaped us; but how had she known we should miss her at Wynn, and so give her the opportunity? That must have been Fraser's doing. And now I remember it was. It did not come rapidly into my head. I had sat for some hours in the gloomy firelight, before I felt that at last the truth had broken upon me. I went over that journey again and again. Each time it grew more clear to me that I had been from beginning to end, duped by two of the very cleverest rogues I had ever heard of. I saw it all at last, and a hot blush burned on my face. If I had had Fraser in my power then, his life would scarcely have been worth an hour's purchase. He had taken me to that carriage on purpose—idiot that I was!—with a lying story of his own valuable property; and there his confederate sat in this disguise. No luggage? Of course not. He had made me linger with him on the platform while the change was being made; and I laughed fiercely as I remembered Fraser's feeble horror when he found himself in the wrong carriage. The wrong carriage! When the disguise had been effected, how were we to know? Was not the little clergyman the widow? Fool that I was, when I had let that hamper pass me! The hamper that held our bags and this disguise, and must have been under the seat during the previous part of the journey! So it came to me by degrees. The thieves I have never seen or heard of since; but, when I meet the gentlemen belonging to the Littleborough bank now, the handshakes they give me are warm and ready, and there no longer rests upon me the shadow of that crime.

# LONDON PRIDE.

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## THE ROOT.

It was the quiet evening-time, and Josephine and I were lingering in the garden. As this was the last day she was to spend with me in my country cottage, it was little wonder that I lingered, or that I watched the setting of the sun with such regret. Josie had her gardening tools around her, and had been feigning to work hard at a slip of a flower-bed under the particular window where I generally sat ; but she had done nothing worth remarking upon, and now sat in unmistakable idleness on the outer ledge of this same window. She wore an old white sun-bonnet of my own—an ugly thing enough in itself—tilted over her eyes, not so much, I fancied, because the red sunlight dazzled them, as because the sorrowful shadow of our parting was upon them ; but below it her face was prettier than any flower in all my bright old-fashioned garden.

Twenty years before that night, Josie's mother and I had lived together in this pleasant little country cottage ; and I—her elder sister by so many years—felt almost as much her guardian then as I felt myself Josephine's guardian now. But from the day on which Sir Lewis Marsh met her in the river-meadows all this was changed. How subtly the change came I could never tell ; and when Sir Lewis took my sister away from me I felt, as certainly as if he had said it, that we two sisters would never be allowed to meet again.

Two years later the news of her death came to me, just as it would have come to a stranger.

Soon afterwards, not in answer to my urgent prayer, as I had felt from the first, and now knew for a certainty, Sir Lewis sent his little girl to me ; and here in the old cottage she had been left with me until, now that she had grown into such a dear companion, he had sent to summon her to him in London. Hopeless though I felt it all to be, I had urged and pleaded, if only to obtain the delay. But Josephine's father had made his own

plans, and was as firm in this as he had been in other things—cruel over it, too, as he had been over other things.

There was one hope I had been nourishing, which I knew could never now have its fulfilment; and it was on this disappointment that my thoughts were dwelling most heavily to-night. Just before me, in the valley where the sunlight still lay in its beauty, stood a large farm which, in our childhood, long years before, had been a kind of fairyland to Josephine's mother and to me, just as, later on, it was to seem to Josephine herself. The master of the farmstead now was a kindly young English gentleman, whose happy face it did one good to look upon, and for whom the picturesque old house would have been a dearer home, I think, full soon, if Sir Lewis's letter had not disturbed all our dreams of the future. I was still thinking of that home which might have been Josephine's, when its master opened my garden-gate, and came up to us with his hands filled with little plants. I could see that he was looking nervous and anxious; and, knowing that Josephine must see it too, I hoped she would be kind and gentle to him on this last night. But I did not feel sure at all; indeed, I never could feel sure of Josephine's moods.

'These are the roots of London Pride,' Graham Harrington said, laying them down upon the path, before he gave us his hand. 'You said you wanted a border of it for this bed, Josie. It will look very prim and old-fashioned, but still you wished it.'

'Did I?' inquired Josephine, her eyes demure under the tilted sun-bonnet, which on any other day she would have stuck on a tree or thrown upon the ground, at Graham's approach. 'I forget. Is there any covert insinuation in your bringing that flower to me to-night?'

'How—— Oh, I see! No, indeed. I never thought of its name,' returned Graham, flushing a little at her words. 'But do you know, I did think, as I carried it here, that the flower reminded me of you. I had never noticed it before.'

'How?'

He had taken a plant in his hand, and her eye rested on it, with his, amused and questioning. Josie, like most young and pretty girls, rather enjoyed a conversation of which she was the subject.

'I hardly know exactly,' Graham answered; 'it is something I cannot explain. Look closely at the flower, and I think you will understand better.'

'It is lanky,' suggested Josie.

'Take the blossom between your fingers, and examine its dainty beauty.'

'Pretty, is it?' she queried, carelessly. 'No, I still think the name gave you the first idea. Of course, after to-morrow the likeness will be natural.'



'Yes. You will have excuse for being proud,' said Graham, gazing into her face with a sad intentness that seemed new to his happy eyes. 'What sort of a life will you live there, Josie?'

'Papa has a beautiful house,' the girl answered; while even I fancied her delight was real; 'and I shall ride, and drive, and dance, and dress beautifully, and not look at all as I do now.'

'I hope you will.'

But Josie's eyes had sought mine now hurriedly.

'What I cannot imagine is how the garden here can be managed without me.'

'If this evening's work be a specimen of your skill and industry, it will be managed easily,' said I, 'and for once I shall store some nuts.'

'But you'll store the earwigs too,' cried Josie, delightedly, though her lips trembled a little, as they had done once or twice before when she had met my eyes. 'Now I'm going to gather the cherries for tea.'

'They grow too high for you,' suggested Graham; 'I must come.'

'Look! A pig in the kitchen-garden!'

The two young figures started at a rush for the kitchen-garden, and I sat and watched them with tears of real laughter in my eyes. Up and down the paths, round and round the trees, dodging the pig and each other, Graham leaping over whole beds of vegetables, and Josie skipping among them, sinking exhausted in their midst, and using the sun-bonnet as a missile! And all the time the air was full of clear, merry laughter, Graham's gay directions to his assistant, defiance hurled at his prey, and the bright raised tones and still gayer rebellion of Josie. The happy sounds came down to me upon the quiet evening air, and as I looked and listened my heart indeed was sad. After the morrow, Graham would have no one but me to speak to when he came over from his solitary home. After the morrow Josie would have no one with whom to laugh and race and jest.

With a merry shout of my own name they ran up to me at last, their faces bright with exercise, their eyes full of glad excitement. So the two faces were to haunt me often afterwards!

'Miss Trotwood's donkeys,' laughed Josie, pushing back her hair—the sun-bonnet was lying on a cabbage up in the kitchen-garden—'were nothing to these strolling pigs. Auntie, who will chase them when I am gone? But I shall have no pigs to chase in London.'

'Luckily you will have no garden,' I remarked, rising when I saw how the brightness died from Graham's face at her words; 'gardening is not your forte.'

No ; no gardening,' returned Josie, coolly ; ' I shall be generally reading novels. What shall you be doing, Mr. Harrington ! '

' Missing you,' said Graham, very low and earnestly.

' And you, auntie ? Oh ! I know,' she whispered, answering herself, as she slipped her arm softly about my neck. " You will always be writing long, long letters to me, telling me everything—everything. You must write a long one every day, and post it every night.'

' The prospect is alluring, my dear. Now go and make the tea.'

When she had left us, Graham, lingering beside me, tried to win me to talk of Josephine's father ; but I could not. Sir Lewis Marsh might not now be the man he used to be ; and I had little right to speak of his old faults.

When we went into tea, we found Josephine as gay and pretty as if no future parting had ever thrown a shadow over her ; but Graham's face was sad enough when at last he rose to go ; though that was not to be his good-bye, for it had been arranged—at his request—that in the morning he should drive round to the cottage and take us to the station.

When he was gone, all Josephine's fictitious gaiety went too ; and she sat beside my chair as quiet as a mouse, until I, finding the silence hardest of all to bear from her, roused her to talk of the life that awaited her in London.

' When may I come back to you, auntie ? '

That was her only question, and I thought it best to tell her plainly what it was harder for me to say than for her to hear.

' Josie, darling, you will never come back to the old life ; and I fear your father will not even let you come to see me.'

' Oh, auntie, he could not be so cruel ! ' she cried, piteously. ' Is he cruel ? '

I could only tell her that I knew but little of her father. Poor child, it was enough to tell.

' You will come and see us, auntie ? ' she pleaded.

That question I could only turn aside, reminding her that, as I made such a fuss over travelling just five miles in to the country town, it was not at all likely that I should ever find courage to travel two hundred and fifty alone. And I did not add—what I felt she would hardly understand—that probably she herself would never ask me to do this when she knew her father better.

Suddenly, in the silence that followed my words, Josephine jumped up and took the railway-guide to the table, studying it closely under the lamp for a long time.

' Auntie,' she exclaimed at last, turning with a long breath of relief, ' there is another train which reaches Birmingham in time for the last Great Western to Paddington ! Oh, I wish I had looked again while Graham was here ! That early morning

parting is so bleak and bitter, and the day so long to—to anyone left behind. We must let Graham know that he can come for us at twelve instead of eight.'

We both rejoiced over this, as if four weeks were gained instead of four hours, and I asked Josephine at once to write to Mr. Harrington.

'I've packed my desk, auntie, so may I use yours?'

I watched her take an envelope and address it, and I wondered to see her so long over the task. It took her but a few moments on other days to address a letter to Graham, yet now she lingered over every stroke of her pen, as if she wrote the name in a dream. She had only just finished it when Graham's own rap upon the outer door made us both start; yet, when he came into the room Josephine turned to him with indescribable coolness.

'Auntie and I were just writing to you,' she observed, as if she and I were accustomed to write our letters jointly.

'Were you? Give me the letter, please.'

'Why did you come back?' she asked, as she quietly slipped the empty envelope back into my desk.

'Because I have been to the station, and find that if you travel by the mid-day train—'

'And I have been to *Bradshaw* and found the same!' put in Josie, merrily. 'That was what we were writing to you about.'

'I want to ask you once again,' said Graham, colouring painfully as he spoke, 'to let me see you all the way to Paddington. I would take all trouble off your hands, and could bring Miss Herbert news of your safe arrival.'

Josie would not hear of this. She declined with a haste which pained him very much, as I could see. But then I could not help agreeing with her, when she explained her reason to me afterwards:

'Papa might be angry, or might be curious, or might even laugh; and then I should feel I had wronged Graham.'

When Mr. Harrington had received his answer, and once more said good-night, I, guessing what he would like, and perhaps what Josephine would like too, proposed that we should walk with him down the garden.

The May moon, at its full, was shining softly down upon the valley; and the young leaves of the ash above the garden-gate were as still as if they had hushed their sweet night-whispers in pity for the mute, grave pain upon the young man's face. And it was then I noticed for the first time that in Josephine's dress was placed a sprig of the quaint little flower Graham had brought.

'I hope,' she said, looking slowly round, her eyes soft and shadowy in the moonlight, 'that everything will look exactly as it looks now when I come back.'

'When you come back,' echoed Graham, sadly.

'You seem to think that will never be,' put in Josie, with a hurried little shake of her head. 'So, Graham, when I picture my return, one of the chief features of the picture must be your surprise at seeing me.'

'If you ever think of me at all,' the young fellow added, still with the gloom so unusual to him, 'What stray thought of yours will ever reach me? It is just as if, with exquisite, rare flowers round you, you could miss this scentless and insignificant one.' And shyly, and full tenderly, he touched the little blossom in her dress.

'Possibly,' said Josephine, in a tone which, though debonair, was very gentle, 'I may miss even my London Pride.'

'You can take a root, my dear,' I suggested, practically.

'I will, auntie.'

'Josephine'—young Harrington's voice was full of eager anxiety when he presently broke the pause—'if you ever feel that you would care to see me—I have no right to expect it, and I do not expect it, for in your father's house and among his friends, you will soon forget me, of course—but if it ever should be that you need me, or think of anything which you would let me do for you, then just send me a spray of this flower, which I shall love from to-night. Send only a spray of this, without one single word, and I will come to you wherever I may be. I shall understand.'

My child laughed a little at his earnest words; but after he was gone, while we stood together at the gate, she was silent, very silent for her, while her arm was round me lovingly. Perhaps unshed tears stayed her words, as they stayed my own.

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## THE LEAF.

I shall never forget the loneliness of those summer months after Josephine left me. I strove hard and earnestly against my depression, but the loss was ever present to me; the solitude intruded on every effort to dispel it: and, beyond this, one fear kept the wound ever open for me—the fear for my child's present life. At first her letters had been just like our old chats, mentioning everything. But presently they changed, and she wrote only of her old life with me; not a word now of her London home; of her pleasures and gaieties; of her acquaintances and occupations; not a word of longing to come back; none of the old girlish speeches, always beginning 'I wish,' or 'I hope,' or 'I wonder;' not a word of her father, and, above all, never one word of Graham—never one word. Over these letters my old eyes grew dim and tearful;

though the worst thought was that other tears had often fallen on them first.

Graham Harrington came to the cottage as often during that summer as he had been accustomed to come ; but I rarely heard the old ring of happiness in his voice now.

Hour after hour would he sit with me through those lovely evenings, waiting and listening for news of Josephine ; or he would water and weed her favourite flower-beds ; or perhaps he and I would sit, just as Josie and I used to sit in the sun-setting, silent and thoughtful, with utter confidence in each other. And at such times as these it was that Graham would win me to read him bits of her letters.

But as time went on I grew to dread doing this, until at last I left it off entirely ; for when I read her words aloud I seemed to hear so plainly the sound of tears in them !

Slowly the winter came upon us—upon me still lonely at the cottage, upon Graham still lonely at the farm. Sometimes I wished that he would resolve to go, in spite of all seeming obstacles, to see my darling. But he never guessed this. He had neither the pride nor the suspicion which would have encouraged such a guess. He pictured Josephine's father, a noble, honourable gentleman, moving in a world in which, he said, he had no place. So, as he had not been able to read the truth in what I read him, could I bear to tell it ?

At last there came one winter morning when I arose with a strong new resolution in my mind. I would go myself to see my child. All these harassing and wearing doubts, which kept me awake and restless night after night, should be set at rest. I might be of no use to her ; I might not be needed to help or comfort ; I might even vex her by my presence. Still I would go, for there was another possibility. So I rose and dressed and started, before I had really given myself time to wonder over my own decision.

What a journey it was for me ! I gave myself up for lost over and over again, and resigned all hope of arriving at my destination. But I asked a great many questions, and got a great deal of help, and so managed at last to reach London, with the loss of only one glove, my umbrella and my pocket-handkerchief.

Before I called at Sir Lewis Marsh's house I engaged rooms near for myself, and left my box there.

Miss Marsh was at home alone—so the footman told me, eyeing me curiously from the brilliant hall, as if Miss Marsh's lady-callers were rare—Would I walk upstairs ?

When my eyes fell on her at last, the tears came with the pain of sudden blindness ; and yet in that moment I did not know why. She was sitting before the fire alone, in a long, beautifully-furnished room. Her dress was handsome and costly, but I

missed in a moment the dainty and bright little tricks of finery which used to vex my stiff old-fashioned taste, yet in which—as I was generally obliged to confess to my mortification—my pet always looked so pretty. Before she turned and saw me, I had time to notice this, and that her beautiful face was worn and pale. A moment afterwards she rose with a cry, and her face was hidden on my neck. We sat down before the fire, she and I, when she had taken my shawl and bonnet; and we talked as—I was going to say as we used to talk, but, ah, it was so different!

I could say very little, and so long pauses ensued between us; while all the time Josie clung to me, as if it were enough for her to see and feel me there, even if I did not speak. Looking wistfully into my face, she would ask me of a hundred things—of myself, of the cottage, of her birds and flowers, of the ash-tree at the gate, of the strolling pigs, of the servants, and of the poor. Then, turning her face quite away again, she would tell me how pleasant it was to see me, though I should be always sorry that I came. Never once, I noticed, did she even mention Graham Harrington's name.

'Papa will not be in to-night,' she said, presently; 'we shall be together. Let me hasten dinner, or, auntie'—while a sudden gleam of pleasure lighted up her face—'shall we have tea together—a dinner-tea, as we used to have at the cottage when we had been travelling all the five miles from the town? Do.'

Of course I liked the idea; but then whatever she had proposed, with such a flash of gladness in her yearning eyes, I should have chosen above all things.

Just then a servant entered the room and mentioned to Josephine the name of a foreign gentleman who waited to see her. Josie rose, chill and stern, when the man had left the room.

'Why go, my dear?' I asked. 'Why not have sent word you were engaged?'

'I dare not,' she answered, and the three low words told me the whole story of her father's rule. 'But you will come with me, auntie? Come with me,' she pleaded, with such piteous earnestness that I, tired and travel-stained though I was, followed her into the drawing-room.

The next hour showed my child to me in an entirely new light. With a calm and quiet grace, totally at variance with her old winning, changeful moods, she received the eager attentions of this German count, who, it was evident, had paid many such visits as this before. No wonder I contrasted my child's behaviour to him with her old treatment of Graham. There was a patient hearing of all he had to say; a patient bearing of his eager attentions; no defiance, no coyness, no teasing, even no laughter, to remind me of the old pleasant evening-times when Graham came to the cottage,

Now and then I tried to win Count Allersdorf to converse with me, that Josie might feel the relief ; but—very naturally, I suppose—he made the conversations as short as possible, and I could see that he would have been much more grateful to me if I had left the room altogether. Just when I began to hope there was a prospect of his leaving, he handed Josephine a parcel, and told her it was the duet of which he had spoken to her on the previous day. Would she try it with him then ? For an instant she turned away, with an impatient weariness, then, as hastily she checked herself, and took the music to the piano. But to see them together there—the middle-aged, dissipated man of the world and the child who had grown up so close to my heart—and to hear their voices blending in this showy, unhomely room, was almost more than I could bear.

When Count Allersdorf left at last, Josephine uttered no word about him, but took me out of the drawing-room hastily. After tea we talked together again, still with that heavy silence falling upon us now and then, and still with the sound of unshed tears in my darling's voice. At last, after waiting in vain for the words I expected, I asked Josephine why she had never inquired after Graham Harrington.

'Why should I ? What have he and I in common now ?' And the question was asked by her even in deeper humility than it had been asked by him.

'He will want to hear all about you, Josie.'

'But you will not tell him ?' she cried, her voice stirred and shaken by its great earnestness and fear. 'Oh, do not tell him ! Promise me, auntie !'

'Why ?'

'Because—oh, auntie, you do not understand—you never can understand ! Could I bear that he should scorn me, as all honourable men who—who knows us—scorn me ?'

'Tell me why, Josie. Your old guardian-aunt should know the truth.'

'But if you are happier not knowing it ?'—and the girl's voice broke into sobbing. 'Oh ! auntie, why did you let me come here ?'

'I knew but little, my dear, of the life to which you were coming, though enough to make me try, with all the power I had, to keep you. My letters were always returned—at first with insult, afterwards unopened—and I could do nothing more. I had no legal right over Sir Lewis Marsh's child. Before you were born, my dear, I knew your father was a gambler ; but there were times when I hoped his life was different now. How is it, Josie ? You have every sign about you of great wealth.'

'Yes, every sign,' she answered, with a shudder. 'But, oh, I am filled with such contempt—for him and for myself ! And such deep, deep shame !'

'Because the wealth is obtained—so?' I questioned, very low.

'Yes.'

'If he would but let you come back!' I sighed, but with no hope myself.

'Let me come back!' she echoed, with a bitter sadness. 'Oh, auntie, you do not understand!'

'I think I do, my dear;' for though I had lived in the country all my life, I had read and heard of such things as this; and I knew a little of Sir Lewis Marsh.

'Auntie'—my child's voice was almost strange to me in its intense and dreary scorn,—'he makes me aid in his schemes now. At first there were terrible times, when he had roughly to enforce his authority; and oh, auntie, more than once I have run away—run away'—ah, it was so pitiful to see the girl glance timidly round the room as if in dread of her own words!—'trying to come back to you, and he overtook me and brought me back! And— and now he has prevented me from ever dreaming again of that rescue; and to this day he makes a taunting jest of it when—when we are alone.'

'That need not hurt you, dear,' I said, though I hardly knew why, for my blood was boiling with indignation.

'And you cannot guess'—the faltering voice was striving hard to be steady—'the lowest shame of all. Oh, don't put your arms about me, and don't look at me so tenderly! I can bear it all better when I feel isolated, as I did before you came. Listen! Again and again he has promised me to—to gentlemen who come here unsuspecting, who know us only as a rich baronet and his—heiress. He leads them on to play, and—to and to admire me; and—oh, you can guess how it ends! Sometimes they bid me good-bye—ruined men. Sometimes'—the girl's white lips were rigid now, and would hardly frame the words—'sometimes they see it all in time, and utter their contempt to me. How can you ever even faintly dream of the agony of listening to such words as these? But he does not care. The next day he will offer his patronage—with his daughter thrown in—to another who, perhaps, openly laughs at the thought of wedding the gambler's daughter, whose name is jesting over in a hundred card and billiard-rooms; the girl whose father'—with such an effort did the young lips frame the word which ought to be lovingly uttered—'offers her for sale to any rich man whom he can make his dupe.' The tears were coming slowly at last into the feverish, wide eyes. 'Now you see how hopelessly I have drifted from the old life, and from you, from—Graham.'

'And have you no power to resist Sir Lewis's commands Josie?' I asked, holding her to my heart.

'I have tried and tried, but all in vain. What is my will



against his? And he is my father. Oh, auntie, if I had only died before I had this to tell—died, with my hands and heart unsullied, in that dear little home of yours!’

‘And’—I felt I must speak now, hard as the words were to utter—‘this gentleman who sang with you to-day?’

‘He,’ replied my child, with a sudden tightening of her lips, ‘has my father’s last promise; and he—will have it kept. In a few days I am to marry him—if I live, for sometimes I feel as if life could not last over that.’

‘I wonder,’ said I, trying to speak quite quietly, what ‘Graham will say about this.’

Josephine started up with a cry that pierced my soul.

‘Graham! Tell Graham? Oh, auntie, you will not tell Graham? If you are to tell him, I can even wish you had not come, though you can never know what joy it was to me to see your face again. Oh, auntie, don’t tell Graham? Graham must not know. He—he will hear of it afterwards, as others will. Promise—promise! I will hold you so until you promise.’

She was on her knees beside me now, her hot and restless fingers tightly clasping mine. I saw with what terrible eagerness the request came straight from her heart; yet how could I promise to stand quietly by and see her sacrificed? Waiting for my answer, she clung to me, and held me, and cried in such passionate pleading, that I could no longer keep silence, looking on the white face of the child I loved so dearly.

‘My dear, could this misery be greater for you just from the fact of Graham Harrington’s knowing it?’

‘Oh, a thousand times greater! A thousand, thousand times!’

So, though I had fought against it resolutely, I could not bear to see her pain, and I promised after all not to tell Graham—not to tell (so she insisted) either by word of mouth or by letter. And, when I had made the promise, I felt that I was the most to be pitied of us all, so utterly disheartened and beyond hope did I feel; while Josie, trying piteously to stay her tears now that she had won the promise, thanked me with broken eagerness.

I stayed with my child as long as I dared, and then went away for the night. But it was a useless ceremony to go to bed, for all the sleep or rest I got. Never in my life had I spent such a night as that, not even after Josephine’s mother had left me. The promise I had given to my child was a binding one, and shut me off from all help in winning her back. I could only return alone, and leave her to finish the shameful career which her father had shaped for her. I could make one more appeal to him, but that was all; and, knowing him, I had no hope at all in that.

I went to his house very early, that I might find him at home; but, early as it was, Sir Lewis was out. He and Miss Marsh

were riding, the servant told me ; but Miss Marsh had left a note for me in her own room.

I thanked the man, knowing this latter part of the message had been privately entrusted to him, and I went upstairs alone. I could not bear even to glance into the handsome rooms as I passed. I felt as if I never again should care to enter a house where wealth and luxury abounded. I found my way easily to Josephine's room, and there I saw the note lying on a table beside the fire. Holding it in my hand, I tried to prepare myself for the worst that it could tell, while my eyes lingered on the signs of my child's late presence. Gradually a certain difference between this room and those below struck me, with a reminder of my own cottage home ; and this increased tenfold when I saw, on the little table beside Josephine's seat at the fire, a flower-pot containing a root of London Pride. The tears rose thickly to my eyes, as my thoughts went suddenly back to that last night, when Josephine wore the flower in her dress, and when Graham had touched it, while we stood with him in the moonlight at the garden gate.

And by degrees a memory came to me which made my heart beat with a new strength of hope. Then my hands trembled, and my eyes grew dim, so that I could scarcely read Josie's note. I had to go through it several times before I fully understood what it told me. Sir Lewis had heard of my visit, and also that I intended to return to the country on the following Wednesday ; so he had taken his daughter away, professedly for a ride, but she knew they would not return till the Thursday morning, when her marriage settlements were to be signed. Following the few sad, loving words to me, came a reminder of my promise ; but this did not dishearten me as it would have done a few minutes before. I folded my child's letter and put it away, took a leaf from the little plant beside the fire, and left the room and the house.

When I reached my own lodgings, I opened my desk and took from it the envelope which Josephine herself had addressed to Graham on the night before she came to London. I had never torn it nor thrown it away, for every memory of that last night was precious to me now. I put the leaf into it without a word of writing, sealed the envelope, and went out myself and posted it. Then, for the first time allowing myself to think it over, I grew terribly afraid of what I had done.

## THE FLOWER.

I did not go to Sir Lewis Marsh's house again, until the Thursday morning on which the marriage settlements were to be signed. Early as it was, I found Sir Lewis and Miss Marsh had just returned.

There came no tears to Josephine's eyes when she met me in her own room, for her misery was far beyond tears now. Though her hands shook almost helplessly as she changed her habit, she would not summon her maid. I tried to help her, and to comfort her, but failed utterly.

'Why are you not gone home, auntie?' she cried, while yet she clung to me as if she could *never* let me go. 'It will be hard even for you, and harder than ever for me. Papa has no idea you can have staved; he has just sent to hasten me. They are waiting for me in the library now.'

'Smooth your hair, my darling,' said I, speaking quite placidly, to all seeming.

'I look,' remarked Josephine, smiling coldly at her reflection in the glass, 'very like a bride, auntie, don't I? Did you ever in old times dream of my marrying? I fancy you did, because you were so good to me—ah, so fond of me! If so, did you picture *this* face! You hardly recognised it on Monday when you came; but it is years older now, isn't it? Auntie, why did you come? It was as if someone called me back from the grave to life again—real life, I mean, loving and innocent and true. It—it is harder to turn back to the grave now!'

I could not speak. I had moved away, and was folding my child's habit in a most ridiculous manner.

'There! I am ready!'—Josephine's chill low voice startled me again—'kiss me now, auntie. It is good-bye. A long, long, hopeless good-bye!'

'I am coming with you. I shall wait to see my child true to herself, brave at the last.'

'How! Oh, auntie, how!' she faltered.

'True to her own heart, and to the man she loves: brave to choose right and truth, even though wrong and falsehood are thrust upon her.'

'But,' she cried, in a voice of keen, quick anguish, 'I have tried and tried, and failed; and now—'

I did not let her finish the sentence. I took her cold hands in mine and kissed her, and then we went downstairs together.

I shall never forget the start Sir Lewis gave when he saw me, for it told so much which his assumed suavity could not afterwards hide. I took my seat in the room as quietly and easily as if I had been summoned: but I tried to look away from Josephine to the gentleman who was chosen for her husband. How

he, of all men, could bear to look upon my child's white face, I do not know. There was a lawyer present; but, unlike me, he seemed to see nothing of what going on.

While her father was reading over one of the papers, Josephine went up to Count Allersdorf and spoke to him, slowly and gently. I forget her words, but they were a last plea to be released from the marriage which he was forcing upon her—such a touching, pitiful appeal!

I fancied perhaps she would not have said this at the last moment, if I had not whispered those words to her upstairs, for hereye's sought mine with a quiet hopelessness, when he eagerly answered that he was prepared to teach her to love him *after* their marriage.

Sir Lewis had at first turned angrily to stop his daughter's words; but he had paused now to listen to a strange voice and step in the hall. Just as the Count gave Josephine that cruel selfish answer, which he uttered with much ardent impressiveness, the library door was opened for a gentleman to enter, and the sound of his step, quiet but fearless, set all my pulses throbbing.

There was a cry from my child's white lips, and it sent me to her side in a nameless fear. But it was a cry of sudden life, not death, and then I knew that Graham had not come too late.

I saw at once what a good thing it was that he had been summoned only by Josephine's emblem. It had made him quite certain that she herself had sent for him, and he took her hands with a proud, prompt confidence which gave him the necessary advantage over his rival, and which could not have belonged to Graham's humble, anxious love, if he had not felt that she herself had acknowledged her need of him at last.

The story was soon told him—my child told it herself, in a few low, broken, troubled words—and then, under his quiet, firm protection, and feeling how steady and fearless was his love, all the strength she needed came to her. Certainly there followed a troubled and miserable scene for us all, and others too; yet Graham was so firm and wise, and Josephine so true to herself, that all came right at last.

And now my child is mistress in that farm across the valley. Such a happy mistress! And on the bright, pretty face of old times, there rests none of the worn, hopeless look of those London days.

In my own garden, just below my window, the London Pride flourishes in a wonderful manner, tended with untiring care by my darling and her husband, who both, it seems to me, love the little humble plant above all other flowers.

## TOLD IN NEW ENGLAND.

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WE are sitting together in the porch, under a perfect canopy of cherry-blossom, and are looking round on fifty acres of as flourishing land as one could find in New England, where—unlike Old England—there is no crowding and no scarcity of space. We have several Englishmen in the state, and the old man opposite me is one. The newspaper—every corner of which has been carefully examined—is laid down now upon his knee ; and the thoughtful, far-off look, which I have noticed often before, has gathered in his frank, kind eyes.

Their dreamy glance wanders out beyond the rich orchard-trees ; beyond the distant beeches, now so softly clothed ; and then it comes back slowly to the wooden bridge below us, where a young girl leans upon the rails, watching a boat rowed rapidly against the stream. As the boat passes the bridge, she bends lower over the rails, and talks for a few minutes with the young man who rows. As he looks up to answer her, a quick, bright flush mounts in his face ; and she, seeing it, and understanding it well, smiles to herself as she goes on her way. A slight, dark-haired, happy-looking girl she is, whose light feet scarcely stir the wild flowers, as she dips into the orchard shadow, and whose clear voice, singing as she goes, sounds like a bird's voice in the forest, so glad and so content it is.

Pulling strongly, but with a short, nervous stroke, against the tide, the young man rows on, with only one loving glance at the girl's retreating figure. A lithe, active-looking young fellow he is, his fair curling hair and happy blue eyes making him look younger than his years.

I do not know exactly how it comes about. I do not know whether I begin to speak of them or my companion does ; whether he reads my interest and my curiosity in my face ; or whether the silence and beauty of the scene and time open his

heart to speak to me now of the life of which he hardly ever speaks ; but, while we sit under the clustering blossoms, he tells me of it. So I understand what has often puzzled me ; the link between the old man beside me and the young one who smiles up at him, as the boat passes on, with the loving glance—half trusting, half protecting—which I have often noticed.

‘My farm in England in those old days,’ the old man says, ‘was but a small one, surely ; but to me it was the pleasantest and dearest spot in all the old country. I had to work hard, of course ; but the work was what I loved, and I had those I loved about me. My worst thought was that my children never seemed to love it. Jessie married and went out to America almost as soon as she left school, and you may guess that that was a sore parting, for she was our only girl. Gradually I began to see that Harry, though he would not say a word of it to vex me, didn’t care about the labour ; and I fancied he was always hankering after a less laborious life, where the work would be for his head instead of for his hands and feet. He had different ideas from his father’s of what were advantages to a young man. For me they were country air, early rising, and the healthy appetite of a farm life ; for him they were books and music and other refinements, the wants of which I could not even understand.

‘But Harry never worried me with any discontent that he might feel. He worked well with me and under me ; but I could find out that he talked a good deal to his mother about the sort of life he would have chosen, if it had been given to him to choose his own. And the mother, though she could not understand his longing, and would not have left her sunny little home for the grandest town house in the world, always listened to him gently, and encouraged him to talk on ; until the feeling wore itself away, and he went out to his mowing or threshing or harrowing, just my own ready, helpful lad once more. And, when his day’s work was over, he would take off his heavy boots, and sit in his blouse and slippers by the fire on winter nights, or at the open window in the summer twilight ; his young head bent over some book or other, I watching him astonished, because I had never opened such a one through all my life—watching, rather frightened sometimes, when it struck me he had too slight a figure for a hardy farmer’s son, or when I noticed how delicate was the face bent earnestly above the open book, or how different from mine were the fingers that lay upon the page.

‘I could not help thinking very doubtfully how such a farmer could manage the land when I should be taken, and how his mother would fare then. This wonder was not to perplex me long, for the mother was taken first. No need to tell you about that ; and, even if I tried, I think I could not. I could not tell even what that loss was to Harry ; much less could I tell what it was to myself.

‘I was saving money then—putting by a good bit most years—and it was a very pleasant thought to me that I should have something to leave the children, let the message come when it would. I suppose everyone who has a little feels inclined to make more ; so when Lawyer Watkin, whom everybody talked so much about, saying he was doing wonders with everybody’s money—doubling it at the least—offered to do a good thing with mine, I was very content he should have it. He and I used to chuckle together over the amount this plan was to bring me, and I thought how astonished Harry would be when he found out what he was to inherit, and how Jessie would stare at the letter which told her of the legacy her father had left her. I really took quite a pleasure, too, in picturing the astonishment of the neighbours, fancying how they would say that, though he had but a small farm, and managed it nearly all himself, old Ravensley died a moneyed man, after all.

‘At Watkin’s suggestion, I declined to renew the lease of the farm, then nearly expired, thinking that, as my money was accumulating so rapidly, I could in another year take a larger one. The year had nearly reached its end when the news came that Watkin had disappeared—disappeared with the savings of half the county, not one penny of which could ever be returned to any of us.

‘I had lost all I possessed, and was a beggar in my old age. A few words will tell that misery. Yet that was not my hardest thought when I heard the sickening tale, and saw the poverty in many houses. It was a doubt whether there *could* be a heaven to look upon such misery wrought by one man, and to let him live in ease upon the widow’s mite, and the hard-earned saving for the orphan children. But I have felt since—knowing how he lived and how he died—that Heaven’s justice is too far above our comprehension for us to dare to question it.

‘It was on a dismal February morning that I went into the house at home, with weak and tottering step, and laid a heavy hand on Harry’s arm—he was waiting breakfast for me.

‘“Harry, we have not a farthing of our own, my lad. We are two of the poorest men on earth at this moment.”

‘I think all he said was trying to comfort me ; but I did not hear a word, for every evil thought I had was busy with him that had done this thing, and the evil words would come crowding from my lips at last.

‘“But we are beggars, Harry !” I cried, fiercely, when he tried to tell me that to hear my words was worse than the loss of the money.

‘“No, we are not,” said Harry, firmly, “for we have never begged, and never will. There’s plenty of work in the world, father, and we both work well.”

‘I looked into his sad, quiet face, and my thoughts grew hot

and wicked when I felt how that fiend had robbed him, and that the world would not help him if this blow should kill me. Then my strength and anger gave way, and I fell forward on the table, sobbing like a very baby.

‘From that day nothing prospered with us, and, when they came to take possession of our home, we were turned out almost penniless upon the world. We had heard only once from Jessie and her husband since their arrival in America, and they seemed to be striving very hard, yet merely earning a bare subsistence. Yet, poor as they might be, I think, if we had had the power, Harry and I would have gone out to them, because we felt so utterly lonely. But we had not. We tried first to obtain employment near our old home, but it was of no use; and at last we went up to London. I don’t know why, except that, as there were more people there, we thought there would be more chance of work. All the way, even in the noisy, crowded third-class carriage, Harry’s face was bright and hopeful. He had been the stronger since our trouble came, in spite of my hard hands and sinewy arms.

‘But how slight and delicate he looked among the folk he travelled with! And how different from their rough manners was his gentle care for his old father!

‘That was not the last time I saw him bright and hopeful, though afterwards it came only by fits and starts between his toilsome, tiring walks about the city, where he sought early and late for work to do.

“‘Wait patiently and bravely, father,” he used to say; “it will come at last, and bring enough for us both.” For he would not hear, while any hope lasted, of my seeking employment too.

“‘It is time your hands were resting,” he would say; “and it would be happiness for me to work for both.”

‘I used to beg him to let me walk back again into the country and get hard labour on some farm; but it hurt him sorely when I spoke of it; and so at last, seeing him grow thinner and more restless and eager every day, I gave it up, really afraid to leave him. But when he was safely away I went out too, and sometimes got odd jobs about the streets, and so could bring home a sixpence or threepence now and then. I pretended it all came out of the little store which was vanishing so fast, for on the first day when, unthinkingly, I told him what I had done, he laid his arms across the window of our attic, and the loose glass shook and rattled with his sobs. After that I never dared to tell him I had been trying to get work. So we went on, while Harry’s face grew sharper and paler, and yet his bright and gentle smile was always ready as a greeting for me.

‘One night—a soft, fair summer night it would have been in this country—Harry came into our bare, sunless room with quite a changed look on his face; and I knew, before he spoke, what



he was going to say to me, when he put his slender hands upon my bent old shoulders, and brought his lips close to mine—so close that I could not help it, wifeless and daughterless as I had been so long, motherless and sisterless as he had been ; his girlish gentle face was close to mine, and I kissed him as if he had been a daughter instead of a son. For years afterwards, in my dreams, I felt the clinging, answering touch of his lips, and was thankful in my heart that, in his happiness that night, he could kiss me as he would have kissed his mother.

‘He had got employment at last ; work which he had been at all day, and in which he could rise, he said, until he was a rich and clever man ; so I should have ease and comfort now. Ah, what a night that was ! I went out, taking some of my little vanishing store, and bought us each a rasher and some beer ; and then we spread a great feast, talking all the time, and often having to stop in our work to laugh at each other.

‘But Harry, in his excited gratitude, could not eat his share after all. He made a worse attempt than he had done even through all that anxious time of trial ; so I ate mine alone, carefully demolishing every fragment, and smacking my lips over them until the happy smile upon my dear lad’s wasted face was more than I dared look at.

‘How he worked through that week, with every power he possessed of mind or body ! He would come panting in to his dinner, having run all the way from the office, and, with a face all full of eager happiness, he would talk to me for a few minutes at our meal and then run off again. It seemed as if he could not eat now, any more than when he was in such doubt and anxiety ; yet he looked so glad that I could not fret about him. Even when he came to me at night—his office-work over for the day—he worked on still.

‘“Harry,” I would say, “you will be a rich man fast enough now, without losing all your resting-time. You take only half of the hour allowed you for your dinner ; you are at the office sooner than you need be, and stay later. This is too much for you.”

‘“I have been idle so long, father,” he would answer, gently, “that it is a pleasure to work now.”

But for all that he would shut his book suddenly, and propose a walk out into the country, which was, of course, always a treat to me.

On Saturday night Harry came home, flushed with a keener happiness and eagerness than ever. His master had praised him highly, and the pleasant, appreciating words were intensely sweet to Harry. He brought his first-earned money up to me, and the thin fingers were hot and trembling when they opened to lay the gold before me.

‘“Father,” he said, brokenly, “I wish it could give, in its spending, the happiness it has given in its earning.”

“All this, all this, my lad!” I exclaimed. “You never told me?”

“No,” said Harry, in a quick, trembling voice, as he clasped his hands together to keep them still, “I wanted a surprise for you. I earned it all, father; and I shall go on, earning and earning until you want for nothing—nothing.”

“But, if you never rest, dear lad, you cannot work,” I said, touching the gold softly and gratefully, but not taking it up.

“This is Saturday night,” he laughed, “and I can rest. Don’t you think, father, that we can go to church to-morrow, out in the country somewhere, where the air is pure and the birds are singing?”

“Yes, yes,” I said, eagerly, “let us go where we can think of the old home.”

“And of the happier one to come,” added Harry, softly. And for an instant I felt a strange, new longing for that restful, sorrowless home of which I knew my boy was thinking.

I felt sure he was too much excited to sleep that night, and every now and then I rose on my mattress, to listen, and to try to look at him. But he lay quite still, and in the morning fell asleep. Silently I lay and listened for his fitful breathing, and when at last I rose in my restlessness, and looked down upon his sleeping face, I knew that he would wake in Heaven.

I don’t know how I knew it. I felt then that I must have known it all night, and been preparing myself; yet when the bells rang all around me, bewildering and deafening me with their call to that service which Harry and I were to have gone together to hear, I knelt moaning and rebelling beside the little bed where my boy lay dead.

I cannot tell of the days that followed. Strangers helped me to carry him to his grave, and then I crawled back along the city streets, hating the glare of sunshine that smote upon my desolate head. There followed long days of which I know nothing, until I crept from the hospital, back to the room where we two had lived, and begged that I might have it once again.

It was harder for me now to find work to do, perhaps because, having only myself to work for, I did not care to try so hard to find it. Slowly—after my own were gone—I parted with my dear boy’s things, but I never touched the sovereign he had brought me on that last night. I never touched it except to look at it now and then, and to lay it tenderly against my hungry, shaking lips. It was as sacred in my eyes as if it had been the dying gift of my favourite child.

One day a new purpose entered my heart. I had been watching a crossing-sweeper receive many a gift from the passers-by, while I stood unnoticed and unhired, when I made a sudden determination. Lest I should go back from it if I left myself time to debate, I hurried away, and with my last shilling bought

the strongest broom I could obtain for it. I found a crossing near the Great Northern Station, and I kept it as clean as if it had been under cover. I was but a feeble old man, but to have seen me sweeping on a muddy day, you would have said my strength was inexhaustible. I said to myself that, if kind hands paid me for the power of crossing there with unsoiled boots, they should be served in earnest. And kind hands did pay me, and sometimes a kindly smile rewarded me. Perhaps it grew out of watching for these, and getting used to a few who passed me every day, but I got at last to think a great deal of the passers, to wonder about the sort of work they went into the city to do, and about the homes they went back to in the evening. It wasn't very natural, perhaps, in an old man like me, but I had no one else to think of, except some one whose memory brought tears into my eyes, and Jessie, who was so far away that my thoughts could not follow her, in a strange country and a strange home of which she had told me so little.

'At a very short distance from my crossing there was a row of dusty houses, all of them, I think, lodging-houses. I never quite got to know the people who kept them, for lodging-house keepers in London don't seem to go out much; but there was a sour-looking woman I used often to notice at the door or window of No. 7; and who almost daily passed me, though never once had she offered me a halfpenny. I grew to dislike her so much at last, that I almost rejoiced when I saw that the card with *apartments* on it was oftener in her windows than in any of the others. "And no wonder!" I used to say, whenever I saw her ill-humoured face.

'One morning, before I began my work, as I looked around me on the familiar scene, I noticed that the card which had been for so long in the window of No. 7 was gone. "Not for long," I said, involuntarily to myself; "nobody stays with her for long." And then I forgot all about it until the evening, when I was getting a bit tired, and standing for a few minutes resting on my broom, and watching the crowd of passengers coming out from the station-yard. Suddenly the sight of one young man, walking alone and coming slowly towards me, struck me with a great shock, and made my heart beat, so that I put my hands to still its pain. The fair delicate face was so like Harry's face, the slight figure recalled my own boy so suddenly and so strangely, that no wonder my pulses galloped and my head reeled. He came on, walking listlessly with a dejected, weary look, which it is sad to see on any young face, and was doubly sad to me to see on this one. As he came up to me, quite naturally and almost unconsciously, he put his hand into his pocket, and looking at me with a smile—a very fitting though pleasant one—he put a penny into my hand, which actually shook at his touch.

'I remember holding the coin almost in a dream, while I

followed him with my eyes. I saw him go into No. 7, and I turned away with a sigh, because it was *he* who had chanced to seek his home there.

‘Day after day he passed me on his way to or from the station, and always, when he passed one way, he held the penny towards me with the same slight, pleasant smile. And always did I look longingly for him, that I might see, for a few minutes, the face which reminded me of my own son.

‘These few minutes got to be the brightest bit of my day, until at last that was clouded, because the face I loved to watch grew to have a fretting look upon it, and the smile which I had grown accustomed to came very rarely. And now, seeing more, and guessing more, than I can tell, I used to avoid him when he came, always trying to look upon him from the first moment he came within my sight until he left it, but trying to be out of his sight when he crossed. His daily gift to me was but a halfpenny now, and the sight of it always brought the tears into my weak old eyes. Weeks went on ; the change came very slowly, yet I saw it always. I noticed now that whenever he left his lodgings he had a parcel with him, and often the woman I disliked would stand upon the step and talk loudly to him as he went. When I saw this, I always knew what she was saying, and would hasten away that I might not see the worn face that day.

‘He was carrying his things gradually away. I knew it well enough, and my heart grew sorer and sorer.

‘There was but one thing I could do—that one thing I would do, for Harry’s sake. The morning after I had made that resolution, I could hardly do any work, for keeping my hand upon the pocket where lay that one precious sovereign which my boy had earned for me.

‘He came at last. It was one of those mornings when I saw the woman standing with him in the narrow passage, speaking with a raised, angry voice, and I wasn’t surprised that he came out and walked towards the station more tiredly than ever. I stood right in his way to-day, and thanked him pleasantly, when with his gentle smile, he put the halfpenny into my hand. He had almost reached the entrance to the station, when I came up to him, panting, the sovereign in my hand.

“‘Look, sir ; you dropped it just as you passed me ; I was barely in time to pick it up. I saw it was yours, and I was afraid of missing you. Quick, please, sir, for I’ve left my broom.”

‘I shall never, as long as I live, forget his face. Much as my own boy had suffered, I knew that I had never seen pain like this upon *his* face. Flushing oddly, he thanked me with dry, stiff lips ; and, though he quickened his pace, I was back at my work before he was round the corner, sweeping with all my might and main, and looking at nothing but the dirt which I collected, for it didn’t matter that I should see that through the tears.

‘He never passed again, and, though I still caught myself often looking for him, I never had really expected him after that morning. Winter had come and was nearly over, yet I had never seen him. Sometimes I cheered myself by dreaming that Harry’s sovereign had saved him from disgrace, and perhaps from sin ; but oftener I felt that, to make so little change a life’s fortune, there must needs be strength and energy to will and work the change.

‘It was a chilly March night. I had been very low and depressed all day, and very slowly I went from my crossing half over London to reach my old room. As I entered the court I had a sort of consciousness that I was being followed, and I remembered that the same consciousness had been upon me once or twice during my walk. I stayed a moment on the step, listening, for it was dark now ; but, hearing nothing more, I mounted the stairs. I made myself busy lighting a fire and tidying up the room ; and when that was done, and I sat down to rest, I was all at once aware that the door had been pushed open a few inches, and a little packet put inside.

‘I took it up and opened it, wondering. In part of an old torn envelope there lay two half-sovereigns. I turned them over and over, though, of course, I knew from whom they came. Then he had guessed that the money was mine ! But why did he not bring it back himself, and tell me he had guessed ? How had he won it back ? Where was he ? Was he now a prosperous man, who could well afford to repay such a loan as this, or was he leaving himself penniless once more ? He would hardly have returned the money so if the payment had been easy to him. I took up the torn paper again, and examined it carefully. There was part of an address written upon it, but only six letters were distinguishable—“—rew’s St.”

‘I puzzled over it a long time ; but I had not lived a year in London without picking up the names of most of the streets—that is a sort of geography which the poorest of us know the best—and so I guessed that the writing had been “St. Andrew’s Street,” and that it was not far away—a poor and shabby street, keeping its own ground with a negligent obstinacy, back to back with the streets bright and alive with wealth and life and energy.

‘I went to St. Andrew’s Street in the morning, and made my way from house to house. They all seemed just alike, high and bare and shabby, only that outside some few of the windows a broken wooden box stood on the sill, with fading, brown stalks straggling over it. Not one had the smallest look of home about it. I spent the whole day in this street, trying to find the man whose name I did not know, and it was dusk before I succeeded at last.

‘Finding an old man, like myself, at the door of one of the

unsearched houses, I began to talk with him, and got on to describing, carelessly as it were, what was my errand. With a shrug of his shoulders he pointed up the stairs behind him, and I went on, oddly subdued and depressed by the man's silent gesture. Should I see the young form lying still and motionless as I had seen Harry's, on that summer Sunday morning, which always was so present to my thoughts? I found the room up many stairs, and beside the bed, where he lay moaning in fever, a woman stood angrily demanding money that was due to her.

"But I haven't it," I heard the sick man whisper. "If I had it, I would pay you. I will pay you when I have it."

"Give me the gold you had yesterday," she rejoined; "you can't have spent twenty shillings all at once. You wouldn't spend it in a hurry after saving it so meanly for so long."

"It was not mine," the sick man cried, as he raised his fevered head, and appealed to her in desperate earnestness. "Oh, believe me when I tell you this, and let me be! Search the room and take all there is only let me lie here without your hard words piercing my head. I will pay all when I am strong again. Have pity for a little time, and leave me!"

'I could scarcely breathe for the great lump that had risen in my throat. Only wanting to be left there alone! Asking for nothing—doctor, medicine, food—nothing but to be left undisturbed, uncared for in that desolate room, where there was not even a glass of water to cool his parched lips!

'I beckoned the woman out to me, and gave her the very money she had been inquiring after; and then she went away, still grumbling a little for form's sake; but afterwards, for the long days and nights through which he fought for life in that gloomy attic, she was almost gentle in her manner to him.

'A kind and pitiful doctor, to whom I appealed, attended him through all that time with untold kindness, and on the very first day that the April sunshine found its way into St. Andrew's Street he tottered from his bed upon my arm, and sat beside the dingy window looking out upon the old green box of withered stalks. I left him so, and hurried to my work. It was doubly needful now that I should waste no time, because I had not myself alone to work for.

'I entered my room for the first time for many days, and all the old loneliness came back upon me, as my eyes fell on the empty bed that had been Harry's. I thought of many things, drearily, miserably wondering whether it would not have been better to let the sick man pass the gates to which he had been so near; wondering whether I should mind it much when I lay here alone to die, as I must do when the old arms, which were so often tired now, had grown useless in their work. But somehow, as I sat there on Harry's empty bed, even these thoughts grew changed; for round every thought of mine was such a deep, glad

memory of my boy, that the gloom seemed always to be kept back by the knowledge that he had reached the happy, restful home of which he had spoken on that last Saturday we were together.

‘I had just risen to leave the room, when I heard the unusual sound of a tap upon my creaking door, and I opened it, to meet the postman face to face. I remember that I had a paper to sign, and that I signed it ; but how or where I cannot tell. I remember that the man smiled a good bit at my awkward excitement, but I do not remember that I did anything with my letter, until I sat down again beside the cloudy window in St. Andrew’s Street, telling my good news to the friend who had grown so strangely dear to me, and watching how the wan face flushed and paled, and flushed again.

‘You guess what that letter was, and what it contained ?

‘Jessie and her husband were prospering in New England, and had written to entreat us—Harry and me—to go out to them. When they wrote, they had just received Harry’s letter, telling of the loss of our money ; so you may imagine how kind and loving their letter was. It was days and days before I could read it all, for the mists that always came between my eyes and the words of love and sympathy. Money was enclosed for our passage, and for everything else that we could want, and I began at once to think of these preparations, for the date upon the letter was a very old one, and it seemed to have been half over England in its search for me.

‘What a time that was, while I prepared for our voyage—*ours*, mine and Harry’s, for his name was Harry too—and, though for long I could not utter it, I have grown now to be glad. He rapidly recovered strength in his eager desire to help me, and I talked by the hour of the pure air to which I should take him ; of the unlaborious toil which, in a fair, new home, would make life pleasant to him. For I was not going without him. I should have a home in my old age among those I loved, but I need not leave behind me one whom I was growing to love. We set sail together on a bright May morning, and before we reached here Harry was as well and active as anyone on board.

‘Jessie’s surprise and grief at her brother’s death were very great, but she, too, grew soon to love her father’s friend, and now no one is welcomed as he is in her pleasant home. You know how well he is succeeding in all his undertakings here, and you know also how well he is beloved. To see him now, and to think of him as he lay in that—— But I never will think of it,’ concluded the old man, ‘except just to be grateful. As I said,’ he added, looking along the river to where the boat had, an hour before, disappeared in the bend of the stream, ‘Jessie loves him now as she loved her only brother, and her daughter, little Jessie, as I cannot help still calling her, has given him all

the warmest, gladdest love of her heart ; while as for me—— But no wonder ; is there a son in all the state more fond and true and tender to his father than is my adopted son to me ? I was thinking, as I watched him and little Jessie talking together awhile ago--she on the bridge and he in the boat below her ; what a help and comfort he has been to all of us, and what a peaceful, love-filled home he will bring Jessie to. And—I felt that the earnest and unselfish life of my own dear lad had not been lived in vain.



## PLOUGHED BY MOMENTS.

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It lay in one of the fairest spots in all the Midland Counties, and yet such a ghostly, desolate, haunted place I could not even have conceived before I saw it. I had seen ruined mansions before, and had walked in rank, neglected, and forgotten parks; but it seemed to me that the isolation and the desolation here were different. I told the vicar so, as he took me round the empty house, pointing out the remnants of past beauty which were even yet distinguishable through the blight of slow decay.

‘But you must not compare this,’ he said, ‘with ruins *purs et simples*, ruins of a picturesque old abbey, say, which probably is your only previous experience. This is no edifice crumbling under Time’s slow stroke. The house stands here fitted up and beautified (sounds absurd, does it?) for its occupant—a refined and luxurious occupant too—but over it, in its beauty and strength, has fallen this—what did you call it?—isolation, desolation, what you will. The simple fact is only this—the estate is in ‘hancery.’

I stood and looked up at the broken windows, heavy with dust and cobwebs, then round the silent, untrodden sweep of park.

‘I could fancy, if such a thing were possible,’ I said, ‘that a curse had fallen on this house.’

‘In the west wing,’ observed the vicar, turning my remark aside, ‘there is a door which, with a little management and strength, I can open. Would you like to see within?—as far as you can, I mean, for it only gives access to three rooms.’

I followed slowly. I was not sure that I wished to enter the house at all; and, though curiosity was too strong within me

to allow me to refuse, I wished that the kind old vicar had not proposed it.

I looked in vain for a door when we reached the west wing. There was only one break in a long low row of shattered windows, and that was a rank and heavy mass of ivy, making a huge excrescence on the wall. The vicar began to pull the branches apart with the hook of his walking-stick.

'The ivy has grown so thickly and rankly over the steps,' he said, 'that I am afraid you cannot mount them. See; the door is on the first story, and we cannot reach it unless we can climb these hidden steps.'

'I can manage,' I said. 'It will be safe to climb among the ivy; only lend me your hand.'

It was difficult to ascend—indeed, it was even dangerous, for the steps were broken in many places—but we reached the door at last, and, by stretching his arm through a broken panel to withdraw the bolt within, the vicar succeeded in opening it.

'I never saw a gentleman's house with such a strange extra entrance as this,' I said, but the vicar had passed on, and perhaps he did not hear me.

The door opened into a small ante-room, so small that a couch and chair and table, with a couple of shelves filled with faded books, seemed quite to fill it. The vicar opened another door opposite to that by which we had entered, and I followed him into a large and lofty bed-chamber, whose satin hangings might have been a brilliant crimson once, but now were faded to a yellow-brown. They hung in tatters where they were worn by the hands which had once been used to draw or lift them, and from end to end were eaten into holes by myriads of moths. About the room were valuable and handsome ornaments and books; and the walls were covered with paintings so beautiful, and so little hurt by time, that they seemed to mock the worn and faded furniture.

'Can there be finer paintings even in the picture-gallery than these?' I asked the vicar, as he unlocked another door opposite to that by which he had entered.

'No; those are the choicest from the gallery. And in this room are the chosen portraits. Come.'

He had opened the door, and as he spoke he pushed aside a heavy padded curtain, under which I passed into a room exactly the size and shape of the bed-room, but furnished as a sitting-room, library, music-room, all in one. Furnished not only handsomely and luxuriously (as I could see through all the disfigurement and decay of time) but furnished curiously, as if a hundred different tastes had been at work, or *one* taste, it might be, varying restlessly from year to year.

'These,' said the vicar, looking round upon the closely-

covered walls, 'are all the best of the family portraits, or I suppose I should say of the most recent ones: the squires and dames of more than one hundred years ago—I mean of more than one hundred years before these rooms were occupied—stare into vacancy from the walls of the long mouldy gallery below. Notice this one, will you? It is the last squire.'

The picture to which the vicar pointed was smaller, I think, than any others, and perhaps more beautiful, though beauty was not rare among these proud, still faces. It represented a young man of three or four and twenty, with a face of remarkable beauty—a beauty rather effeminate certainly, but of such exquisite refinement, and telling so plainly of high birth and descent, that I could not see, even when the vicar pointed them out to me, any pride in the handsome fearless eyes, or insolence upon the curling lips.

'I never saw a face more beautiful,' I said, speaking in a whisper, without exactly knowing why. 'And he was the last squire? He never married, then?'

'No.'

'Did he die young?'

'N-o.'

'Will you tell me how it was?'

'Not here,' the vicar said, and passed at once to other portraits, talking rather hurriedly of them.

There were two doors in this apartment, exactly opposite each other—as there had been in the first two rooms of the suite—and before both there hung the padded velvet curtains. The vicar pulled these aside from the door opposite that by which we had entered, and showed me that it was locked, and the key taken.

'I told you we could only gain access to three rooms,' he said, 'and now I'm afraid you have seen all that I can show you.'

'But before we go back,' I urged, as I rested on a faded couch before the portrait of the last squire, 'you will tell me the story of this desolate place?'

'I will tell it you as we walk home,' the vicar answered, but when he saw how tired I was, and that we must rest there forsooth, he took another of the chairs, and, brushing off a little of the thick dust and cobwebs, sat down upon it, and began the story in a low, uneasy voice, which made me so nervous that presently I even feared to look around me.

'Lindley Warwick was a very young man when he inherited this estate, very handsome, as you see, and proud, with a pride that was ultra sensitive and refined. That such a man, possessing a fine estate, of high birth, and educated and accomplished as few country gentlemen were in that time, should be a favourite in every London drawing-room, is surely no matter of

surprise ; that such a man, skilled in all manly exercises, and free and lavish with his wealth, should be a favourite in every country mansion in the Midlands is equally no matter of surprise. Few who enjoyed his brilliant conversation noticed the absence of generous sympathy, or the cold indifference to those who did not enter the magic circle of refined and cultivated society in which he moved ; and few who gazed in admiration on the fine and perfect face noticed that the haughtiness which sat so well upon it was but a cold and cruel pride after all. He lived here but a month or two in every year, and then he always had the house full of guests, and ruled with the most lavish splendour. Between those visits he enjoyed gay seasons elsewhere—now in his handsome house in London, now on his shooting estate in Scotland, now abroad, and now visiting among other families. He was the mark at which all the looks and thoughts of mothers were directed, he was the idol of their daughters, he was almost the unrivalled pet of society.

‘ One day, when he was staying here with a crowd of gay and fashionable visitors, there was a clumsy attempt made by a couple of burglars to rob the house. I believe it was the squire himself who first heard them, but at any rate they were surprised before they had even effected an entrance, and a little boy, whom the villains had put through a broken pane to unfasten the door to them, was the only person captured. This boy was the only child of a woman who lived a very quiet, solitary life, in a tiny cottage which had been given her by the late squire himself. She was a Spaniard by birth, a beautiful, dark-faced woman, who, though she lived so near him, had never been heard to mention the name of the rich man who had lured her from her native land ; a woman whose silent, solitary life was bound up in that of her child. When she heard that the squire had locked up her boy and sent for the police, she came up to the Hall for the first time since the squire’s father (the father of her own child) had turned from her last prayer ; and she told the young squire, with eager, burning tears, the one reason why he should have pity on her boy. He smiled his cool and handsome smile, and quietly advised her, if she lied at all, not to lie to her own shame.

‘ When the police came and took away the child—stretching his arms out to his mother—she stood, with white and rigid lips, in the great hall ; not even following him with her eyes, for they were fixed upon the handsome face of the young squire.

‘ The boy, a pretty, timid child of scarcely twelve years old, being brought before the magistrates, told his tale with many tears. He had been walking quietly home the evening before, when two men overtook him and walked with him. They talked a great deal together, though not at all to him ; but when he turned from the turnpike-road to go home to his mother’s cottage,

they bade him walk a little farther with them, and they would give him a present for his mother. He went on—a long way he thought it—and then they took him into an empty cottage, and kept him shut in there until it was quite dark. They carried him then to the Hall, as he could not have found his way in the dark; and they put him through a small broken hole in the window, and bade him unfasten a door he would find close to him, telling him if he did not he must stay there in the dark for ever.

‘This was all the child told; but it was plain to see how he had been frightened by the threats of those two villains.

‘I believe one of the magistrates suggested that the terrible fear the boy had undergone had been sufficient punishment for him; but the idea was quietly smiled to scorn. The child was sentenced to solitary confinement for two years—ay, though the poor foreign woman fell on her knees before the squire, and pleaded to him as she might have pleaded to her God.

‘Before the time of the sentence was half told, the doctor ordered the boy to be removed to the hospital. “This solitary confinement is most fatal to a delicate, growing lad,” he said, with a grave shake of his head. “If he does not die, he will be a hopeless idiot for the remainder of his life.”

‘That worse fate was spared him; he *did* die; and the mother, to whom this news had been a death-blow, though she did not know it then, crept to the mansion here, and asked to see the squire.

‘His servants told him, and he smiled a quiet smile. “Give her money; nothing more is needed for such as she.”

‘She looked down vacantly upon the offered money; then she stepped back a few paces, and raising her hands solemnly to heaven, called down its judgment upon the master of this house, pleading that the punishment to which he had unjustly doomed her boy might visit him. And the caressed and *fatal* squire, looking from the window, saw this scene and smiled.

‘Five years went on, and still Lindley Warwick lived his brilliant and luxurious life; flattered, admired, and sought after; committing none of his father’s sins, only leading his life of cold and pitiless self-indulgence. But when these five years had passed, he came one day, unexpectedly and quite alone, to his London house. He went out on the morning after his arrival in a hired cab, with his face muffled in a white silk handkerchief; and, when he had been closeted for long with a famous physician, he returned and ordered the house to be locked up again, as he was going down to the country.

‘He came here at once, and, even before he took off his great-coat and the muffler that was about his face, he summoned to his presence four old servants who had lived here through all his life.

‘It was to this room they came, and he stood there on the hearth, his face half turned away as he talked to them. They had been surprised enough at his unexpected and solitary arrival—he who used to come in state, when every room in the house had been prepared for the guests who came with and followed him—but what a much greater surprise awaited them !

‘He told them that every servant in the house was to be dismissed, except themselves ; that either of them who objected to this, or would not obey him to the letter in what he was going to require, could go at once before he spoke farther. But, if they stayed, they must strictly and on their oath observe his orders. He told them there would never again be guests in the house, to require their labour or attendance ; that except their own premises only these three rooms would ever be occupied. He told them that from that day he intended never either to see or to be seen by man or woman, and, showing them a loaded pistol with a double barrel, told them one bullet was for anyone who should dare to intrude or look upon his face, and the other for himself afterwards. In these three rooms he should live apart, he said, and he would have doors through which no prying eyes could penetrate, and locks no hands but his could understand. He would give the rest of his orders in writing, he said, after the other servants were dismissed.

‘So at once began this life of terrible suffering solitude ; and though no one ever from that day penetrated into the young squire’s presence, and though he had told his secret to no one, still it was understood—for the quietness of the whisper was horror, and not doubt—that a slow disease was eating his life away, and must first of all destroy the beauty of which he had been so keenly and so sensitively proud.

‘Year after year life went on for him in this awful solitude. Into these rooms he gathered about him all he could to make such life bearable, and sent for the choicest of the pictures in the gallery to hang around him.

‘When he rang this bell, the old man-servant found his written orders passed under that locked door ; when he rang the chamber bell, the door between the two rooms was locked, and the curtain hung heavily between ; but that outer door was open, and the man could arrange or take away the meals (during these meals the young squire had no attendance), light the lamps or fires, or what not. When the inner bell of all rang, the chamber was at liberty, and the servant who went about his tasks there hastened over them, knowing that his master sat the while locked in that little ante-room beyond. For he never went down into the park from that door (though he had had it made on purpose) until the whole household—and the whole village too—had been for hours in bed. Only in the deep night darkness did he ever venture forth, and no one had ever chanced to see him then.

‘And so in this awful solitude—never looking on the face of man or woman—never hearing the voice of a fellow-creature—never himself seen or heard—the master of this beautiful home lived for nearly twenty years. Think of it! Picture such solitude and such suffering for one week, then draw it to a year, and then to twenty! But, to fully comprehend its weight to him, you must remember the life he had led, the ultra-refined and haughty nature of the man, and his intense sensitiveness, both to physical pain and to anything in the slightest degree loathsome. Remembering these, and the burden of the secret to be kept, while the curious world, which missed its idol, clamoured to be told the reason of his living death to them; you may imagine a little of the acute and almost unbearable suffering of those twenty years.

‘At last there came a time when the meals were scarcely touched; then there were no orders put beneath the curtained door at all, until, one day, a written paper lay there bearing a summons for the clergyman.

‘An old man the vicar was then—as old as I am now—and it was he who told me this story, just as I tell it you. He came and prayed, as he had been bidden to do, kneeling in this outer room. He knew the door was opened leading into the bed-chamber, where the squire sat; but he had been bidden not to pass beyond the closed curtain, and he never dreamed of trying to do so. He raised his voice, and prayed in terrible earnestness, but no answering voice reached him through the heavy drapery. He might have thought the squire was dead but that there came a written word of thanks at last.

‘Next day the vicar came again; but the doors were fast then, for he had not been summoned, and there was no evidence from within that his plea for admission was even heard.

‘That night the frightened servants sent for him again. They could hear no sound within their master’s rooms, and for two days now, they said, he had not even admitted them for food.

“You shall fetch the doctor,” he said, “and we will enter somehow—he and I—and save him, if we can. You must all remember his orders and your oath.”

‘They broke the lock of that first door with great difficulty, and the doctor and the clergyman stepped softly in. This door—the one that leads into the chamber—was ajar behind its curtain; and when they entered they saw at a glance the solution of this ghastly mystery.

‘The squire lay dressed upon the bed, his loaded pistol still grasped in the stiffened fingers of his thin right hand, and his left stretched toward the curtain of the bed, as if he had been going to draw it round him when the end had come.

‘He had not used the pistol, though Heaven knows, if there could ever be enough temptation to excuse self-murder, it was

here ! No, in this solitude and ghastliness of suffering he had awaited his release.

‘The doctor gently covered the face which had been so proudly beautiful, that the ghastly sight might hurt no other eyes ; and it never did. The faithful old servants remembered and obeyed their master’s orders even now. For nearly twenty years they had lived with him and never looked upon his features. Throughout this one day that they had access to his room they kept their oath most sacredly, and left the soft white covering on the face which, in its decay, they never could have recognised.’



## CO.

DART, MAITLAND, DART, & Co. So the names stood upon the great brass plate; and in these names had the business of the bank been prudently and profitably conducted for as many years as the majority of the inhabitants of Highborough could recall.

Trade panics had laid waste many another long-established firm; bankruptcy had swooped unexpectedly upon many a house where wealth had *seemed* as limitless as here; but the bank of Messrs. Dart, Maitland, Dart, & Co. held its head high above all treacherous waters, and stood unmoved and utterly secure after the heaviest gales had passed.

The name of the firm was a passport of trust and reliance, as well as a prompt introduction to the first society of the county; and the present representatives were Maurice Dart, the senior partner, a handsome man of fifty years, who imagined that the wishes, weaknesses, and hopes peculiar to other men could not move him now; and Walter Maitland, a strong contrast, both in appearance and manner, to his senior partner. Though but ten years younger, he looked nearer thirty than forty, and the frankness of his blue eyes, and the gay words so prompt upon his lips, seemed doubly frank and doubly gay, contrasted with his senior's reticence and gravity.

The third partner was one in name alone. Captain Dart's father's death had left him a rich share in the bank, but his only intercourse with it was the periodical acknowledgment of its having swept away those debts which were the worst enemies he had had to fight since he entered the army.

About the Co. there was, of course, that vagueness which is

inseparable from the word. In the outer world it was supposed that an unlimited number of people had invested their savings or their patrimony on purpose to be considered 'of the firm.' But among the clerks only one case was known with certainty. He was neither the oldest nor the most experienced, only the most cheerful and most industrious. He had deposited in the firm the sum which his father, through a forty years' course of valued and profitable managership, had accumulated to bequeath to him ; and so, being enabled to draw what doubled his salary as clerk, Tom Leslie looked upon himself as a partner of no mean order, and built lofty castles for a time when his name should stand upon the brass plate otherwise than as Co. Cheerfully and constantly he erected these edifices ; but to attempt to lay their foundations on *terra firma*, either by saving or speculating, never entered Tom's head. With his mother—a little old lady, as hopeful and cheerful and trustful as himself—Tom lived in a pretty white cottage beyond the town, and here he had flowers all the year round, and birds that sang in the gloomiest weather, and a piano on which he was no mean performer. And as regularly as Saturday morning came round, Tom, taking his hat, would say, in the most natural manner, 'I think we should like one of the younger fellows out to dinner to-morrow, shouldn't we, mother ?' 'Their salaries are not like mine ; and things are dear, you say.'

True, their salaries were not like his ; but then he would not have the small bright house nor the small bright mother denied any comfort he could think of, and so there was never one penny of Tom's salary left when the year was up.

Once or twice Mrs. Leslie would inquire, ruefully, where her son picked up the dinnerless clerks whom he delighted to bring home to supper—or, as he always called it, 'to a little music'—but her genial hospitality was, after all, as prompt as his. Therefore, though she kept the accounts, there was never a penny of Tom's salary left when the year was up.

'He thinks that that four hundred pounds a year of his is a king's revenue,' thought Mrs. Leslie, one Saturday morning, watching her son cross the road, drop his gift into the expectant hand of the crossing-sweeper, and turn at the corner to nod to her. 'He will soon expect me to adopt a few young men whose salaries are less than his own. If he had but inherited his father's saving nature !'

She tried to regret this dolefully, but, after all, she could not help the warmth of perfect satisfaction filling her eyes.

Even his practical father had rejoiced that his nature was his mother's, from the time that nature began to assert itself at all in little Tom. 'Little Tom' then to his parents ; 'Little Tom Leslie' afterwards among his school-fellows ; 'Little Leslie' now among his fellow-clerks.

On this particular Saturday morning, as he walked to the bank, Tom loitered a little in a quiet street of handsome private houses, before one of which stood a couple of cabs piled with boxes. Tom waited long enough to be sure that the cabs bore nothing but luggage : then he walked briskly on, and, entering the bank excitedly, told his fellow-clerks of the arrival of the colonel's household ; and for fully five minutes forgot, in his excitement, to add his genial invitation for the morrow.

When the coming of the regiment had been discussed, and Tom's pleasant invitation accepted, he turned to his desk—not to loiter again throughout the day. An hour afterwards Mr. Dart drove up, and, with a quiet 'good morning,' passed through the bank to his own private room. Here, presently, Mr. Maitland joined him, and, standing before the fire, discussed various items of town news, among them, of course, the arrival of the regiment.

'Colonel Conyngham has only one daughter. We must help to introduce her. Young Dart, having once belonged to the regiment, gives its colonel, as it were, a claim upon us.'

'The colonel's daughter will need but little introduction,' remarked Maurice Dart, quietly.

DART, MAITLAND, DART, & Co. The names stood unaltered on the great brass plate, yet—except the sleeping partner, away in India now—each one represented by that sign was perfectly aware that a great alteration had been growing in himself ever since Colonel Conyngham and his daughter had been living in Highborough. The strong bank walls no longer limited his hope and ambition. Beyond them stood revealed a home of love, and ease, and sunshine, brightly possible ; and in this future the only mission of the good old bank was to furnish the home with luxury.

It was a winter night. The bank windows were bolted and barred, the great books locked away in their trusty safes, and the manager asleep upstairs, with the loaded blunderbuss beside his bed. But in his brilliantly-lighted drawing-room at home sat the senior partner ; a striking-looking man in his evening dress, with the hot-house flowers fading in his coat. The room had been filled with guests up to this hour, but now Mr. Dart sat alone before the fire, buried in a gravity which deepened minute by minute, until the door was opened, and Walter Maitland re-entered the room he had but lately left.

'I could not help coming back,' he said, beginning hurriedly to speak, as if the words forced themselves from him in his nervous haste. 'There is one thing about which I have wanted to speak to you for a long time. I feel'—he was leaning against the chimney-piece opposite to his friend, and looking with intense scrutiny into his quiet face—'that I have been dreaming a dream which a word of yours could at this moment dispel. Tell me, if

it be so. It will be greater kindness than your silence, though kindness is sure to be the motive of *that*. Tell me at once, Dart. It cannot be very pleasant to you to see my anxiety. You are far too good a fellow to feel pleasure in that.'

'What am I to tell you?' inquired Maurice Dart, without meeting his companion's eyes.

'Surely you know? I said to myself that when I met Isabel in your house to-night I would find out if my fears were well grounded; and, if I could not discover, I would ask you for the truth before I left. Dart, end this wearing suspense for me. It has been growing through all these months, side by side with my love, and has become unbearable at last.'

Maurice raised his head now, and met his companion's anxious, questioning eyes.

'I am glad you have spoken, Maitland,' he said; 'I have guessed at your anxiety while I have felt my own, and I have often wished to break the silence we have held on this one point. I fancied you had something to tell *me*. I fancied so but now, when I saw you enter the room.'

'Indeed, no!' exclaimed Walter, with his usual frankness; 'I wish to heaven I had. I wish I dared to say that Isabel had given me encouragement enough to make me even hope. And I could not ask her to—love me while I felt that you knew how useless it would be.'

'I do *not* know,' returned Dart, his words sounding very slow after Walter's eagerness, yet all his self-command failing to hide their new ring of hope. 'Isabel has never heard a word of love from me. She is gentle, and kind, and winning always; but I cannot read beyond.'

'To me, too, she is bright and pleasant always,' put in Maitland, restlessly; 'and I can discover nothing more. I fancied you could put me out of one phase of this uncertainty.'

'And you are very glad to find I cannot,' said the elder partner. And then their eyes met, with a smile which was strangely wistful for such strong and manly faces.

'Dart,' said Mr. Maitland, 'you are the elder man—the richer—the better, too. You shall speak first. Do it as soon as you can.'

'Seniority has no claim in such a case as this,' said the senior partner. 'We can wait.'

'I can wait no longer,' put in the younger man, impatiently. 'Anything will be better than this suspense. Why on earth should we wait? Isabel knows us both now. She knows we are too old for this love of ours to be anything but deeply earnest. She knows enough of us and of our position to make her decision easy to her. So let us know the worst—or best. You have the right to speak first.'

'I will not take it,' said Mr. Dart, speaking more quickly than he had yet done. 'Let us write. Let us write—together.'

A few minutes' silence, while Walter thought this over, leaning his head on the arm which rested on the chimney-piece.

'Let that be decided,' urged Maurice. 'We will write to-morrow. Let her receive the two letters together. Promise me your letter shall be ready by to-morrow's post.'

'I promise,' said Maitland, raising his head again. 'Thank you for this arrangement.'

The fire roared and crackled cheerily in the private room at the bank, but neither of the partners had arrived.

'I never knew him so late,' remarked Tom Leslie, as if finishing aloud a puzzling conjecture.

'Who? Old Dart?'

'Mr. Dart, yes.'

'Leslie feels it incumbent on him to uphold the dignity of the partners,' put in another clerk. 'His breast swells proudly with a fellow-feeling.'

'What an idle set you are this morning!' remarked Tom, turning from his desk with the quick, kindly smile which made his face so pleasant to look upon. 'As soon as ever I am senior partner I shall give you all a sweeping dismissal.'

The listeners laughed, enjoying the absurdity of the idea, and one or two questioned him, with mock anxiety, as to the treat he intended to stand them on the occasion. Through all the laughter Tom pursued his work, and Mr. Dart noticed this when he entered the bank. Though it was but very curtly that he answered Tom's quiet greeting, yet before he reached the inner door he turned and spoke to him.

'Cold outside, Leslie. Keep up good fires.'

'It is hard,' he muttered to himself, 'to pass *him* without a word.' Then Mr. Dart let the spring door close behind him, and, sitting down in his office chair, leaned on one arm only, as very calm men do when they are ill at ease as well as tired. He was sitting so, looking moodily down into the fire, when Mr. Maitland entered the room. The senior partner did not turn to greet him; and, even when Walter stood upon the rug beside him, he did not venture to meet his eyes.

'Maurice,' began the younger man, 'I suppose I may congratulate you. It is rather hard, yet no one ought to do it so heartily as I, who know what a good fellow you are, and what—what a wife you have won.'

A glance of surprise into his friend's face; and then Mr. Dart spoke, in few words, as was his custom.

'She has refused me, Maitland.'

'Refused you!'

Walter repeated the words, though not incredulously ; only truth, he knew, could have weighted them so sadly.

'She has refused me, too,' he said. 'She has never cared for me except as a friend—merely as a friend.'

'In a few kind words to me,' said Mr. Dart, without looking up, 'she told me she had given her love elsewhere. I was trying, when you came in, to prepare myself to tell you I rejoiced in your happiness, Maitland. And now you—you come and say the same to me.'

Buried in one long, sad thought, the partners in the good old firm sat in their silent room, while the work and pleasure of the world went on.

But the day's duties had to be gone through, and these were not men to shun them selfishly.

'I suppose we had better settle with Leslie about his holiday,' remarked Mr. Maitland that afternoon, sending to summon Tom to the partners' private room. 'He will lose every glimpse of summer if he waits longer.'

'He should not have postponed his holiday. He had his choice. Well, Leslie, when do you wish to start?' inquired the senior partner when Tom entered the room. 'You said about the middle of October, and this is the twentieth.'

'Thank you, Mr. Dart, but, if it would make no difference, I would rather take my holiday *from* the twenty-ninth.'

'Then it is to be hoped you are going on a visit,' remarked Walter Maitland, pleasantly ; 'for November days are not the pleasantest for a tourist.'

'I am not going on a visit, sir.' Tom hesitated only a moment, then both his listeners were conscious of a new earnestness in his voice. 'I should like to tell you, gentlemen, why I want my holiday then. The twenty-ninth is to be my wedding-day.'

Mr. Dart returned quietly to his writing.

Mr. Maitland rose from his seat, and moved to the fire, turning his back on Tom. Before the eyes of both the partners there hovered a face which had led *them*, too, to dream of a possible wedding-day—dreams from which they had so lately been awakened.

It would be hard, with these memories rising thick, to talk to their favourite clerk of his good-fortune ; yet it was not in Walter Maitland's nature to let any selfish feeling sway him.

'Indeed, Leslie,' he said. 'I am surprised, but very glad, of course, to hear it. I prognosticate every happiness for your wife. Of course, I cannot do so for you until I know who she is.'

'You know her well, gentlemen,' said Tom, flushing. 'Her father, Colonel Conyngham, is my mother's cousin. We rarely visit them, except when they are alone, because—at my mother's cottage—of course we could not entertain *their* guests. We have always been—good friends, as relatives should be ; and

I have always loved Isabel, but it was necessary to wait a little. Though it would be difficult for you to realize the fact, gentlemen, a marriage is an expense ; and debt——’

‘You can go, Leslie,’ remarked Mr. Dart, without raising his head.

‘And the holiday, sir ?’

‘Take your holiday when you choose ; only don’t make such a fuss about it.’

‘And is there nothing more you intended to say to me, Mr. Maitland ?’ inquired Tom.

‘I should say,’ remarked Walter, with a jealous anger in his eyes, ‘it is an irreparable mistake you are making to marry on *your* income—unless you had chosen a wife in your own position, and accustomed to such a life as your mother’s.’

‘My mother’s life was such a life as Isabel’s at Isabel’s age,’ said Tom, and for a moment his face was really handsome in its flush of honest indignation ; ‘and Isabel has known my mother’s life for many a year past. Would I marry her under any false pretences ?’

‘I presume, then, that Miss Conyngham knows the extent of your income ?’ asked Mr. Maitland, with compressed lips ; ‘or have you, in your foolery, been representing yourself as a partner in this bank ? Her eyes are open to the folly of what she is doing, eh ?’

‘She knows everything, sir,’ rejoined Tom, his eyes much puzzled and a little angry, ‘and she does not call it folly.’

‘You can go.’

The clerk left the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

‘They must have had harassing letters,’ he said to himself, trying to account for the partners’ impatience. ‘They have a good deal of anxiety which we subordinates are spared.’ And thinking this he took his seat and wrote away more diligently than ever, while his fellow-clerks wondered over his mood.

‘Leslie ought to go.’

These were the words which at last broke the silence of the room which Tom had left.

‘Yes.’

Then the day’s work went on to its close, and the partners, separating on the bank steps, went their several ways, thinking very longingly of one to whom both had been faithful, and very angrily of one who had been faithful to them. This was the first night, for many months, which either of them had spent without those bright, vague dreams of what his home might be, with Isabel at its head, and their hearts were filled with resentment against the winner of the prize which they had coveted. ‘You knew this morning that she was to marry someone else—why should your thoughts be harder now that you know *who* has won her ?’ So a voice seemed arguing ; but, below all, the

angry thought surged on : 'For *him* to be the one to gain her!—*he*, a paid servant in the bank !'

When Mr. Dart reached the bank next morning, worn and harassed after his sleepless night, he found that Maitland, contrary to his usual custom, had arrived before him. Though the two friends greeted each other as usual, a most unusual silence settled presently upon them both. Eventually the senior partner, making an effort, remarked on the coldness of the weather, and his companion, putting down a letter which he held, answered listlessly. But his pleasant blue eyes were restless and rather dim, and the moment the answer was given, the silence wrapped them both once more.

For an hour the office clock had ticked a solo in the quietness, when Walter Maitland rose slowly from his chair with the *Times* unfolded in his hand, and, letting the paper fall, came and stood upon the rug beside his friend, who had just re-entered from the bank. Very gently he laid one hand upon his senior's shoulder.

'Dart, old friend, I want to speak a few words to you in great earnestness. Since we met yesterday morning I have grown to feel quite certain of one thing—quite. The time has not in reality been very long, but it seemed so, and gave me plenty of opportunity for thought ; and what I have grown to feel so sure of is this—I shall never marry now.'

'Nor I,' replied Maurice, meaning it as men do not often mean the phrase, though they utter it as firmly.

'I fancied not. Now we are both wealthy men, Dart,' continued Walter, bravely and gently, 'and this wealth we offered, a day or two ago, to Isabel Conyngham. You guess what I am going to say ? Shall she benefit by our—love for her ?'

The senior partner looked up slowly, questioningly. A thought which had been haunting him all night made the full meaning of these words quite plain to him.

'Yes, I see you have felt this,' resumed Walter, quietly, 'just as I have felt it, and that my words only came as an ending to your thought. I understand how it put itself to you, thus : Leslie has invested all his father's savings—his patrimony, as one might say—in our bank, and spends his whole days here most conscientiously, most trustworthily. All he draws for this cannot keep a house which we—you and I—like to picture as Isabel's home. And then his mother has to be provided for. You think, Dart, that it would not hurt us, and could not make any difference to Captain Dart, who has no voice in any bank matters, if Leslie had power to draw what should keep them a little more comfortably ? In short—in short, old fellow, you would make him equal partner with me ?'

'With ourselves,' said Mr. Dart, shortly—'with ourselves, you mean. If we were all equal partners——'



'Let us discuss it this evening. Think it over till evening, Maurice,' put in Walter, feeling that the senior partner should have time to make his decision ; 'we will talk it over again.'

The discussion was duly held that afternoon in the partners' private room ; then Tom was summoned to hear the result of it. Though not a long interview, it was one impossible to describe ; for how could any words show the utter failure of Mr. Dart's effort to maintain his grave reserve through Tom's extravagant, boyish, humble, proud, ridiculous gratitude ? or describe Walter Maitland's persistent and mendacious assurance that, 'as Mr. Dart had decided to make this arrangement, *he* was very glad to accede to it' ? And, after that interview, who could repeat the limitless promises Tom made to his fellow-clerks when he told them of his marriage ? or tell how he reached home in half his usual time, and put his arm about his mother, with his eyes full of tears—just as if he had been thirteen instead of thirty ?

But, above all, who could describe Isabel's mute, wondering gratitude to the two men to whom she had given such pain ? 'I am very, very grateful, Tom,' she said, appealing to him, with tears thick upon her lashes : 'but—I would rather not talk about it—yet. Let me have time to think of it.'

Quick to understand her wish, and delicate in carrying it out, Tom left her, delighted that his news had moved her thus, yet wondering over it a little too ; because the secret of the partners was so safe in the keeping of the girl whom they had—not unworthily—loved.

But hardest of all would it be to describe how brilliantly before Tom's eyes that night there came a vision of that identical brass plate which met him face to face when, after his 'holiday,' he first reached the heavy, familiar doors of the Highborough Bank—

'DART, MAITLAND, DART, & LESLIE.'  
Co. was no more !

## NETTIE DUNKAYNE.

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A LITTLE old-fashioned chamber, and a little old-fashioned occupant ; a prim, tiny room, full of quaint treasures and fanciful, unfashionable devices ; and a prim, tidy head at the window, full of quaint treasures too, and fanciful, unfashionable ideas. A head which the May moonlight touched rather sadly, when Nettie raised the blind and looked up beyond the unmoved white blinds opposite ; up beyond the tiles, white and wet, on which the moonlight glistened ; up beyond the pale, pure moon itself ; searching the line of sky which hung above the narrow street. Perhaps the wistful eyes could read no answer there to the one great question which troubled them, for, when Nettie drew the blind again, lingeringly, there was a great seriousness on her small face.

She moved her dressing-table back into its place before the window, lighted her candle again, and, standing at her high, narrow chest of drawers, opened a little desk that stood there. Each thing had to be taken out separately, that it might be put in neatly afterwards ; first the beaded pen-wiper (all the ink-stains on which were confined to the black cloth, the scarlet being dazzling and unspotted) ; then the little case that had 'Postage stamps' worked elaborately in the centre, and contained one stamp ; then the flat bag of white silk with 'Answered' embroidered in black on one side, where lay four letters, neither crumpled, nor yellow, nor worn, yet within six years as old as the girl who handled them so tenderly. Then another bag, of black silk, this labelled 'Unanswered,' in white letters ; and Nettie drew from it the solitary letter it contained. It was a sheet of note-paper, barely filled, but she lingered a long time while reading it ; perhaps because she was not accustomed to skim over delicate, lady-like epistles ; perhaps because the tender, affectionate terms were new and delicious to her, who never found them now but in those four letters her mother had

written to her fifteen years before ; perhaps because she was trying to read in the straight black lines, as she had tried to read in the glimpse of moonlit heaven, an answer to the doubt which puzzled her.

After she had finished, Nettie turned back, and, almost unconsciously, read the last leaf aloud to herself.

‘ As I tell you, dear, I should have urged all this before ; but I waited until you should be of age, and legally able to decide for yourself. Now you will come to us at once ; we are waiting and longing to welcome you, Nettie, my child. Your cousin, Greville, who has not very much to do here at home, and is glad of an excuse for a journey to town, will bring you. Do not write me any scruples, for I cannot read them. Do you think your mother would have countenanced the life you lead ? I do not hesitate to say this, for Mr. Dunkayne has forfeited all claim on your gratitude of love. I do not care even to remember that he is your father, Nettie dear ; I merely know that by his conduct you are living a wretched life ; that nearly all he earns he spends upon his own dissolute pleasures, and that any day his employers may weary of his carelessness, and you may be homeless and penniless. I know that on the rare occasions when he is at home he is not a fit companion for you. My dear, is this the life you can bear to think your mother looks upon ? I know her wish would be that you should come to me. My heart bleeds for you, my poor little lonely child, and I can feel how she would rejoice to see you here at Burnside with us. Who so proper to be your mother now, Nettie, as your mother’s only sister ? Come and be a daughter to me, and a sister to Greville, the only cousin you have in the world ; and in so doing you probably do the only good in your power to that man whom I am ashamed to call your father. Remember that any scruples you may urge I shall look upon as insults to your mother’s memory. I am ever, dear little Nettie,

‘ Your affectionate aunt,

‘ ELLEN LYTTTELTON.

The silence in the room after Nettie had read these words aloud to herself, seemed long ; then the candle was snuffed with a quick, resolute little hand, and Nettie, still standing against the high drawers, began to write the fifth answer she had already composed to this letter. This one should be posted ; this should be the real one ; but how hard it was to know exactly what to say !

She wrote, slowly and carefully, to say that she could not go ; for her first duty was to her father. Who was to live with him, and care for him, if his own daughter left him ? Whose duty or pleasure (put in with a little gulp) ought it to be, if not her own ?

She signed her name, after many words of love and gratitude, read the letter over and over again, folded, sealed, and addressed it, put on the one stamp out of the perforated case; then lay down in bed and tried to think of total vacuum. Trying to think of nothing, of course, was the very way to think of everything, and the puzzled little head upon the pillow was as far from sleep as the thoughts were from vacuity, when the entrance bell clanged with a peremptory, impatient pull. Nettie sprang out of bed; slipped on her dress with nervous, hurried fingers; ran noiselessly downstairs, and opened the door, just as another peal startled the silence.

'Have you kept me long enough, do you think?' was the greeting that awaited her, as her father passed in, steadying his steps with difficulty.

Such a slouching, pitiful figure, despite its height and good proportions—such a mean, unmanly face, despite its regular features and soft gray hair—that it did well to hasten out of the pure moonlight into the gloom of the unlighted house!

'You told me never again to sit up for you, father,' said Nettie, as she bolted and locked the door. 'You took your latch-key.'

'I did not,' he retorted, fumbling in his pocket.

'You said you would,' she answered, very low.

'Don't argue with me.' All the more angrily he said this, because he found he had the key. 'Where's my supper?'

'It is one o'clock,' said the girl, coldly. 'Surely you have supped somewhere.'

'That's no business of yours. Get me some hot water.'

'Not to-night, father,' she said, coming nearer to him. 'It is too late for me to light another fire.'

For an instant a softened look stole over his face at her touch. As it faded, the bright resolution in her heart, which he little guessed of, faded with it. He gave her an impatient push.

'Get the girl up to light it then, and you go to bed. I never can see what use you are in the house. You seem to me to forget who's master here.'

'Would you rather I remembered you as master instead of father?' asked Nettie, slowly.

'I would have you remember I am both,' he answered, trying to strike a match; and, as he failed, muttering words which made the girl shiver as the chill night air could never do. 'Well, what are you staring at?'

'I was trying,' said Nettie, without turning her eyes away, 'to do as you say—to remember that you are *both*. I will light the fire now.'

The great church clock was striking two when Nettie stole back into her little bedroom—dark now, for the shamed moon had glided away to look on other sights—and the two heavy strokes

vibrated through her like two heavy beats of her own heart. Relighting her candle, she opened her neat little desk once more and began to write ; neither slowly nor carefully this time, and putting in no word that was unnecessary. She only wrote :

"I will come. I have thought and thought, and perhaps it is best

'Your grateful

'NETTIE DUNKAYNE.'

She did not read the few words after writing them ; she folded the sheet hastily, and fastened the envelope with a great deal of unnecessary pressure. Then she found she had used her only stamp for the long letter she had written three hours before. She decided to take it off in the steam of the kettle next morning, but she would not tear the other letter up—at any rate not until then.

Once more the young face lay upon its pillow, and the dawn, creeping in at last with its cold, calm smile, found the wakeful eyes searching still.

Nine o'clock ! The bell went languidly through the nine strokes ; and, though the sunshine made only feeble efforts to look in at the windows below, it danced brightly round the old grey tower. Nettie caught a faint glimpse of it as she sat waiting breakfast for her father ; her hair and her dress neat and prim as ever, and her work in one hand. At the sound of her father's step she started up, reading his face intently as she greeted him. Poor child ! There was little to read there, save utter moodiness and discontent.

'Is this all you have for breakfast ?' he said, sitting down before the little dish of eggs and bacon, which Nettie never touched.

'Yes, father, that is all to-day,' she said, handing him his tea, and never wondering why he had no relish for his food.

After that, he did not speak, even to answer Nettie, until he had finished. Then he pushed back his chair and rose.

'Late again,' said he, 'and another snarling in store for me. You can go to bed when you like to-night, child. I shall not be at home again until to-morrow. I suppose you won't cry over that.'

'You are always away a great deal, father,' said Nettie, with an odd little catch in her voice. 'I never go away at all.'

'Whose fault is that ?' he laughed, carelessly. 'If anybody likes to take you, you may go.'

'Should you not care ?' she asked, with a pleading wistfulness in her innocent eyes.

'Not a bit,' he answered, listlessly, feeling so sure his words would not be put to the test. 'What would it matter to me ? Now, then, is my hat brushed ?'

When she had brought it to him, she laid one nervous little hand upon his arm.

'Open the door,' he began, impatiently.

'But say good-bye, father. I—you are going away, you know.'

'What tragics! How many kisses do you want?'

'One.'

'Take it then.'

'Father,' said Nettie, looking into his eyes with an odd, old look on her small face, 'I believe, if we were parting for ever, you would not kiss me of your own free will. Should you—should you?'

'Take your arms away, baby. When we are "parting for ever" you will see; no need to rehearse it. Open the door. You always try to make me as late as you can.'

Standing back, almost shrinkingly, in the little passage, Nettie watched the tall figure turn out of sight, but not with the backward glance which the girl would have so gladly grasped at in that moment of doubt and indecision.

The cloud-shadows rolled daintily along the smooth green lawn at Burnside, and as they hurried on they ran up Nettie's white dress, and touched for a moment the thoughtful face. They passed quickly and softly, as shadows should pass, from a young and guileless face; yet some one coming towards her fancied they lingered unusually long in the big, innocent eyes. A young man this someone was, with a gay, handsome face, from which his straw hat was pushed back; and as Nettie sat on the grass, thinking how sweetly yet sadly the chime from the distant white steeple broke the Sunday hush, he looked down upon her with a very tender light in his laughing grey eyes.

'How beautiful, Greville!' she said, her eyes brightening suddenly, as he held out a delicious half-blown tea-rose. 'Is it for me?'

'Not,' he answered, slowly beginning to put it into his coat, 'unless you ask me prettily.'

'Then let us come in to tea.'

But Greville stood where he was.

'Look up into my eyes and say, "Dear Greville, give me the flower, please;" you know exactly how to plead when you like.'

'I have forgotten,' she answered, with a gentleness that was almost sad. 'I have a great deal more than I want in every way. For what should I plead?'

'Is it so new to you to have everything you want, dear?' asked Greville, tenderly.

'You know it is,' replied Nettie, with a little catch in her voice.

'Let us go now.'

'Stay, Nettie,' he said, slipping lower still beside her on the grass; 'I will leave off now asking you of your past life, as I

have been so fond of doing—fond, simply because it obliged you to talk of yourself, dear. Of course it was right of my mother to insist upon your dropping all connection with, and, if possible, all remembrance of, your father ; but I can perfectly well understand your own hesitation at naming him, and why you shrink from showing him to us in the character of a—I mean in an unpleasant light—as you must do when you tell us of your old life. Therefore, from this evening, Nettie dear, I will never speak of him again if I can help it, and will only try the harder to make your home bright and happy enough to satisfy you, and make up to you for all the shadows that lie behind. But I want one promise from you, Nettie ; that you will never again talk of leaving us, as you have once or twice lately grieved me by doing. Promise me.’

She was looking far off, beyond the earnest, handsome face, and her parted lips were quivering painfully.

‘You are happy with me—with us, Nettie?’ he whispered, anxiously.

‘Too happy ! Oh ! you don’t know what it is to be loved, and petted, and valued, after——’

‘I can fancy it, dear,’ he answered, when she stopped, ‘as you can never fancy how delicious the loving, and petting, and valuing are to us, to me especially, Nettie.’

She did not blush at his heartfelt words, ready as her blushes were at other times.

‘Greville,’ she said, bringing her eyes slowly back to his face, ‘day after day I have wanted to tell you something, and have always been too cowardly, because this happy life makes me shrink from hardship and coldness. But I think I can say it now. You remember what the children sang when we went into church to-day. That gave me the courage I wanted. Greville, if auntie will let me, and if you don’t mind, I would be happier to go back again—home.’

‘Are you hot out here ? Do you really wish to go home ?’ asked Greville, attempting to rise carelessly, but pulling his hat a little over his face.

‘I mean home—to my father.’

‘What unnatural whims little girls do sometimes take !’ he said, stroking her hair softly. ‘Come, you said it was tea-time.’

‘Greville, I really, really mean it,’ she cried, in hurried, trembling tones. ‘Oh ! listen, please.’

‘I will not believe you mean it, Nettie,’ he said, huskily. ‘Mr. Dunkayne has made no effort to recall you. You know how little like a father he has ever been to you. How can you set him before us, who love you so dearly ? It is cruel to us, if it is not cruel to yourself.’

‘Oh, hush !’ she cried, covering her face suddenly. ‘I thought you would help me to see what was right.’

'If you let me help you dear, it is plain to see,' said Greville. 'It is right for you to stay *here*; to be a dear little helpful daughter to your mother's sister, and to be—oh, it would take me a long time to say *what*—to some one else, whose claim I hope to make stronger than a father's; stronger a hundredfold than that of such a father as yours.'

'I seem to know only three people in the world,' said Nettie, with piteous sadness, 'and you make me cast off one of them—or two.'

'Not I, dear,' returned Greville, eagerly. 'He it was who did it first. Let us talk no more of him. Here is your flower; it will brighten up that wistful little face.'

'Those words we sang to-day haunt me, Greville,' she said, walking slowly beside him, and looking on before her with eyes he could not fathom; 'I feel as if I had been told to go to my father.'

'That prodigal's father was a loving and generous father, dear,' answered Greville, gently, 'else he would not have gone back to him. Here is mother. How she would laugh at this new notion, if she knew it, Nettie!'

The restful Sunday twilight lingered, with drooping wings, above the quiet valley, but the shadow of those soothing wings fell heavily and sadly into the pleasant room, through the open windows of which the summer evening fragrance crept in wooingly. Sadly, too, the twilight fell upon the three who talked together there.

Mrs. Lyttelton looked hurt and disappointed, as her gentle arguments failed to convince Nettie that this notion of duty was a childish and mistaken one; that it was even sinful in her to hanker after that miserable life from which she had been rescued. Greville—speaking fretfully as he leaned against the window opposite her—rebuked her for having *seemed* happy with them, when she must have been discontented. He told her it was selfish and ungrateful to leave her mother's friends; even wicked to choose to go back to a sin-shadowed life; and told her it would have been kinder never to have come to them at all. Then, suddenly breaking off in his reproaches, he pleaded their love for her, their loneliness in her absence, their disappointment in her. But, while the girl's face paled and quivered, her voice kept firm and resolute; and he turned away from her, and paced the room, uttering hot and angry words, which pierced the breaking heart in which this love of his had awakened a new life; and brought sharp tears of agony into the eyes that were looking out amid the deepening shadows with their old searching gaze.

He pictured her two homes in all their vivid contrast, pictured her going back to the old stagnant, comfortless life, after these months of sympathy and companionship. But the



answer was all one, though the fingers were knit tightly in each other, and the young lips puckered with pain. Following his words, she could not helper thoughts picturing the change that had been wrought in her—an uncared-for little girl, with worn face and shabby dress—since she had been welcomed into this pleasant home. She remembered how impossible she had found it to add at all to her father's happiness; yet how she seemed to have it in her power now to add to her aunt's and to Greville's. She asked her own heart, was it not really wicked, as he had said, to go back to a sin-shadowed life? Then her head drooped against the window, and her eyes grew bewildered in that search of theirs among the shadows.

'You will have forgotten these silly feelings in the morning, Nettie dear,' said Mrs. Lyttelton, rising and kissing her, in sudden pity; 'if not, I shall have recourse to a little wholesome authority, and forbid you to speak of it again. As for giving you permission to go back to the life I took you from, that I shall never do. Now go to bed dear. I am quite sure you will have forgotten this to-morrow.'

But on the morrow, when Greville came in from his morning ride round the farm, and sought his little love, he could nowhere find her. Nettie and her little shabby clothes were gone, and in the sunny chamber nothing was found but the pretty dresses they had chosen for her, and a tender little penitent letter that had a quaint, resolute bravery in all its pathos, and ended with a few words blotted by tears: 'I will arise and go to my father!'

'I loved her as my own child, Greville,' said his mother, with swimming eyes; but she has cast off the love we gave her, and the home we offered her. It was a cruel thing to do.'

'Dismissed like an errand-boy! After twenty years of service, dismissed like a common errand-boy! Of what use to me were their regrets and advice? I am too old to begin life anew. If I could, I don't suppose I should care to do so; it shall run itself down now in the readiest way I can find. There's no one but myself to suffer for what I do.'

Mr. Dunkayne raised his hat a moment from his hot and haggard face, as he walked listlessly towards home.

'I may as well go there as anywhere. I suppose it will be gone in another day or two. Well, let it go. It will make little difference to me whether I have a home or not. There's nothing to attract me there.'

'If there were, would it keep you at home? Had it ever done so?' whispered conscience.

Conscience was not a soothing whisperer lately to Mr. Dunkayne, and he wearily put his key into the lock of his own door, quite unconsciously picturing the little daughter who used to open it to him so readily; bitterly conscious how changed the

house had been since her fingers had ceased to be busy there. He entered the room with his head stooping forward, as it generally was now, and, even before his eyes were raised, something in the atmosphere of the room breathed of a change. His pulses quickened as he looked up. The window was open, and the summer evening breeze had in it a faint memory of gardens, far away, and of scented hedgerows out of reach of the city smoke. No wonder; for on the bright, neat tea-table stood a bunch of honeysuckle, and near his own chair a glass of fresh, sweet roses. Above them—above all, sweet and sunny—stood his little girl herself, in her own familiar brown dress, her little apron shining with age and wear, but having a wonderfully home-like look, with the keys sticking out of one pocket. He stood for a moment looking at her, as if he feared to move and break the spell; and the young face in its childlike purity, and in its brave, unselfish tenderness, seemed to come towards him across the stained current of his backward life, to show him an undreamed of brightness that lay beyond. And he felt an odd, childish longing to stretch out his arms to her, and let her guide him out of hearing of its turbid rush. Perhaps unconsciously he did so, for after that moment his arms were round her, and her head lay against his beating heart.

‘Father,’ she whispered, ‘will you take me back, though I have sinned?’ He drew her closer, but no words came through his tightened lips. ‘Are you glad, father?’—there were such sobbing tears in the loving voice! ‘Kiss me if you are. There is no need to tell me so in words. We shall always understand each other now.’

Little Nettie had never, since her mother died, felt upon her lips a kiss like that, and it brought the tears that had struggled in her voice straight up to her eyes.

‘Father,’ she said, looking up at him with glad eyes glistening through them, ‘it is far, far better for me to come home.’

And the father, remembering the sort of life the child had led in this home of his, bowed his head on hers, and let the childish tears flow as they would from his own eyes; knowing, perhaps, that *they* would add nothing to that tainted current from which his little daughter’s love was leading him.

## KATE'S ENGAGEMENT.

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June 12th, 1865.

My sister Rachel's crisp little tea-cakes were done, as she said, 'to a turn,' and I hovered over them endeavouring, unobserved, to purloin the nicest.

'If you and Leonard are going to drive to Rynance this evening, Kate,' Rachel said, tacitly foiling my efforts, 'we had better have tea at once. While I make it, you run and call Leonard, you generally know where to find him.'

Yes, I generally know where to find him, even if I do not happen—as I happen whenever I can—to be with him. I knew then that he was resting on the old stone seat at the orchard gate, and I joined him as gladly as I always join my dear lame brother. But then I forgot to tell him that the tea was ready. I laid upon his hand the rose I had gathered in the porch, and then I sat down beside him. What an afternoon it was! I wanted Leonard to talk to me about it, but he did not; so I sat as silent as himself, though not so tired nor so still. A lazy blackbird, high in the larch opposite, was enjoying the delicious restfulness of the summer evening. I could see his little dusky form among the green-tressed branches, but not a note did he feel brisk enough to utter, though all around him birds answered song to song. My eyes wandered among the orchard shadows, looking in vain for an apple ripe enough to gather. I caught sight of a bunch of pinks growing on the weather-stained old garden-wall, and I tried to calculate how soon they would fringe it all round. Before I had arranged that, an active wasp selected my nose as an object of attack, and I could only dismiss him by exertions which were quite unsuited to the weather, and entirely incapacitated me from pursuing the problem. My eyes wandered back into the old-fashioned garden, every flower in which I loved so well. The swift cloud-shadows glided coolingly over the scarlet flame of the geraniums. The old house threw its own brown shadow on

the turf, but its line of gabled windows blinked brilliantly in the evening sunshine. There was a mellow warmth, and peace, and homeliness about it, and I said, just as if the old, old thought had come to me then for the first time, 'Leonard, I wonder whether you and Rachel love this dear old home of ours just *quite* as well as I do?'

My brother smiled a 'Yes' for his part of the wonder, and I knew he might answer yes for Rachel too. Just as I thought of her, she came out into the porch and called us. I rose at once, singing back my answer merrily, and Leonard put his arm in mine. How pleasant it is to be able to give even a little help to those we love! I often wonder what I would *not* do to brighten the life of my invalid brother, or add a single joy to Rachel's. But then I always stop that thought, because I have not been tried, and my strength may not be deep and steadfast.

How Leonard enjoyed those cakes! And Rachel was as glad to see it as though the little scene were new, and had not been enacted a hundred times before. Just as we were driving off, amid Rachel's last instructions to Leonard to put on his waterproof when we stopped at Rynance, papa rode up among us on his beautiful young horse. He stopped us while he gave Leonard instructions for next day. He was going to dine in Helstone, he said, and might not be home until to-morrow night.

'You must be at the Manor all the morning, though the squire *may* see about things himself. Now, Rachel, come and give me a snack before I dress. The maids never bring what I like unless you manage it. Hold your reins higher, Kate. If you can condescend to drive such an animal as that, drive him respectably.'

'Papa seems to think we ought not to be content without driving thorough-breds, as he does, Leonard,' I said, as Brownie walked sedately out of the yard.

'Going away again!' sighed Leonard. 'It is the same day after day. How I wish he would stay at home more, or that I were more fit to take his place.'

'Never mind, Len,' I said, as cheerfully as possible, for what was the use of spoiling this drive for him? 'The squire would soon get another agent if he felt that papa neglected *his* business, and that's more important than our own farm, isn't it? Mr. Keverne is so prompt and wise himself, that we may be sure he would not tolerate any neglect in a subordinate.'

'He wouldn't approve of it, of course,' Leonard said; 'but he is so generous that he may be patient when he is not satisfied, and the patience must wear out. I've often heard him talk very seriously to father, and that has always done good; but things soon go back into their old groove.'

Brownie was trotting now, and looking as self-satisfied as he always does when he gets on the bridle way across the heath

Just from here we could see the chimneys of Trecothick, the old Manor-house where Mr. Keverne lives with his sister and her little girl. While I looked at it, and Brownie tossed his head and drew us swiftly over the springy turf without the aid of whip or reins, I thought of the squire's long, undemonstrative kindness to us ; of how Mrs. Grey, for months, had been wishing me to be her little girl's governess, and teach her for the few years she will remain here in Cornwall, before her husband leaves the army and they all settle in Scotland. I thought of little Rose ; of her warm love for me, and her shy, winning patronage of Leonard ; and while I thought these things a feeling almost like anger sprang up in my heart against my father.

'Oh ! Leonard, isn't it a real sin for those who have a certain duty to perform not to perform it, especially when it is due to one who is kind, and good, and forbearing ? Papa is clever, and understands the work he has to do. I cannot think how he can neglect it. I don't think I could, Len.'

'Wait till you are tried, dear,' he said, gently.

'But why should my purpose change when I am tried ? I wish I had learned farming,' I said, presently, 'that I might have helped you, Leonard.'

'Hush, dear ; it is reminding me of my own uselessness. Let me think I do all that my father expects me to do—all that you so often do for me. Oh ! little Kate, what should I be without you ?'

'Think of Mrs. Grey wanting to separate us, Len !' I said, winking very hard from some unpleasant sensation in my eyes, as we rolled along, and met the sea-born breeze.

'Yes, she was urging her old request again this morning. Rachel will not tell you because it worries her, and she knows it worries you. I'm sorry for Mrs. Grey, because she is so anxious to keep Rose with her here, and does so dread the idea of a stranger to teach her. Yet I have no patience with her when she wishes you to live entirely with her. Why, Kate, I cannot fancy the dear old farm without you !'

A whim came over me to ask Leonard which he would rather have—the dear old farm without me, or me without the dear old farm. Of course he laughed heartily at the question.

'It isn't as if I *needed* to work so, Leonard, is it ?' I asked, wistfully, before I dismissed the subject. 'Then I suppose I should be willing ; but now—— Well, don't let us talk of it any more, just to spoil our evening. We shall have a glimpse of the sea in a minute.'

So we watched for it, driving on over the green and purple heath, and knowing exactly at what spot we should see it first. How beautiful it was ! The wonderful rocks, standing alone or in clusters on the sand—one, a perfect and beautiful arch, standing upon the beach without support and without companion—

the water, with the deep, vivid green and blue, rarely seen but on this very coast ; the breeze, fresh and strong, straight from the sea, not yet laden with even the moorland scents. We did not leave the pony-carriage, because Leonard is not fit for climbing ; but I drove Brownie as far out upon the cliff as I could, beside the little wooden houses built for the accommodation of tourists. There was no sound but the mellow splash of the water on the shore, and the lowing of cattle in the distance. To me the scene was grandly yet peacefully beautiful, and I was sorry when Leonard pointed out to me a gentleman sketching just beyond us.

‘It is Mr. Etheridge ; the artist who is staying here.’

I do not exactly remember how it was managed, but Mr. Etheridge joined us, and brought his picture up to the carriage to show Leonard. It was not until Leonard told him that I had sketched that very view in water-colours, that he spoke directly to me. I think it must have been a good while that we stayed here talking ; Brownie patiently sniffing the sea air and watching the cormorants ; Leonard with almost a healthy flush on his delicate face ; Mr. Etheridge leaning on his side of the little carriage, but looking across, and talking most to me. Quite suddenly the clouds swept over the moor behind us, and broke above us in the swift, drenching rain to which visitors at Rynance soon get accustomed. We would not wait and shelter in Mr. Etheridge's room, but we *did* consent to his next arrangement. He helped Leonard on with his waterproof, settled me on the seat behind, with an umbrella, then himself took the place next Leonard, and drove us rapidly back across the moor. The rain ceased before we reached home, and Mr. Etheridge modestly proposed to leave us ; but Leonard persuaded him to come on to the farm, and to stay and sup with us. He was charmed with the house ; and when we took him to the old stone seat under the laburnum, and Leonard told him it was my favourite idling-place, he promised Leonard a sketch of it with me in it, if I would consent.

It was late when he went away, and then he refused to be driven, but walked slowly into the grey mist. Rachel says he has kept Leonard out far too late, loitering about the place ; but I was with them, and I ought to have thought of it.

August 31st, 1865.

Mr. Etheridge and papa have been out together all day, and after dinner we had a pleasant, musical evening—except papa, who slept tranquilly throughout ; and, indeed, I ought to say except Rachel, who would perform the part only of indifferent audience. I cannot imagine why she dislikes Mr. Etheridge. She owns he is very handsome, but she will own no more. Even Leonard too will not grow to care any more for him than

he did on that night nearly three months ago, when we saw him first on the beach at Rynance. Leonard says he is listless and purposeless ; but then how can that be ? Can a man be an artist if he is purposeless ? Besides, we never see Mr. Etheridge really at work, because he only professes to be idling away this summer, painting our beautiful coast. After that he goes to Italy to study hard for three or four years. Then—then, I dare say, he will be a great painter ; one whose footsteps will ‘echo through the corridors of time.’

When he went back to-night to his funny little rooms at Rynance, papa went with him, preparatory to an excursion they are to make to-morrow to the Scilly Isles. Papa is the only one who seems to value Mr. Etheridge’s society—I mean he does so, and Rachel and Leonard do not.

As Rachel and I went on our nightly tour, inspecting all the locks and bolts on the ground-floor, we were startled by a long, light rapping at the front door. Was not I astonished to see the squire walk in when I opened it ! He came into the hall, where our flickering candle was the only light, and he stood there for a few minutes chatting ; while I wondered—and wondered—whether he really could have come at such a time merely for the purpose of doing this. So grave and strong and tall, he looked in the dimness ; with that quiet fearlessness about him which always makes me feel that if I had done wrong at any time, and he told me of it, with that same quiet fearlessness in his face and manner, I should feel most terribly humiliated. I *think* so.

When would Mr. Carew be at home ? He asked the question quite easily and naturally, yet I fancied, too, that he looked anxious as he asked it.

Rachel told him to-morrow night, she *hoped*.

‘To-morrow night !’ he repeated, and I am sure his tone was vexed. ‘Will you ask him to come up to me as soon as he returns—directly he returns ? Will you remember this, Miss Carew ?’

While Rachel promised, he shook hands with her in his kindest manner ; then he turned to the door, which I was opening.

‘Good night,’ he said, but he forgot to offer me his hand. ‘Shut the door behind me, and lock it safely. It is a gusty night. Close it at once, and open it to no one else to-night, my child.’

I laughed a little, wondering what visitors we were to expect after eleven o’clock. But I was very soon serious again, for I never like Mr. Keverne speaking to me as if I were a child. Eighteen is not at all so very young, yet I cannot impress him with that fact. Mr. Etheridge must needs aggravate me too in the same way ; for he said, when he sketched me on the old stone seat, that he would rather paint me as I should be in a

few years' time. When I had locked the door behind the squire, I told Rachel what he had said—she had stood back, for fear of the wind blowing out her candle—and she looked as demure as possible over it.

'If Mr. Keverne said that,' she whispered, 'he must fear something which we don't understand. Oh, Kate! kind and patient as he is, we cannot hope for others to be so forbearing, and papa is more idle and extravagant than ever. I'm sure he is gone away now on purpose to avoid *something*. I can see that his letters have been frightening him a good deal lately.'

'Surely, if he had feared anything *here*,' I said, 'he would have stayed at home to face it.'

But Rachel only shook her head at that, and kissed me without a word.

September 1st, 1865.

I think it nearly always happens that, when an unexpected sorrow falls upon us, it swoops straight down upon some hour of wonderful happiness or peace. I can well remember what a holiday Leonard and I were enjoying years and years ago; how the old garden-walls were echoing back our song and laughter; when Rachel suddenly came home to us, and, in the midst of our joy (increased tenfold by seeing her), gathered us in her arms and told us we were motherless. I can remember what a merry day we were spending at Rynance when Leonard fell. How he and I had climbed a rock which we had often longed to climb, and stood together, wrapped in the splendour of the sunset light, watching the beautiful pictures in the sky, and laughing happily to think how we would surprise Rachel by telling her where we had been, when—one instant's heedlessness, and my brother lost the health and power which never can be his again. So it has been again to-day, for our grief came down upon an hour of perfect peace and rest. Leonard and I were standing together in the porch, waiting for Brownie. On the far horizon the upland touched the blue, unclouded sky, while the bright white clouds bent above us. The beams from the low sun glanced across the meadows, blending the many purple tints upon the moor. A great laden waggon came up from the harvest-field, and wound on towards Trecothic. A crowd of excited swallows darted from the eaves above us, and wheeled round and round, with a soft, rushing music.

'They will be going soon,' said Leonard, idly watching them.

'Aren't they happy, Len? Aren't they glad to go? Look; surely the schools must be breaking up, and the elders packing, or the young ones wouldn't be so mad.'

Leonard's eyes followed mine. The light leaves of the clematis rested on his bright hair, as he leaned opposite me;



he looked so happy and so well that I did not dread his riding away to take papa's place at Trecothick, as I often did dread it. A click of the side-gate, and Leonard and I both turned to see who was coming. A few words falling coldly in the sunshine, and then it seemed as if the dear old home were gone beyond my reach. But all I knew distinctly was that Leonard had fainted.

I had just written so far to-night, when I heard the sound of gravel thrown lightly up at my window. Without looking out, I knew who stood below; and, unfastening my door, I crept noiselessly down the stairs and out into the garden, stooping among the flowers close up to the house, because the moon was nearly at the full, and shed a tell-tale light upon the grass.

'Are they here—in possession already?' my father asked in a harassed whisper when I joined him.

I told him the men (whom a London creditor had sent) were sleeping in the room near which we stood; and so, in silence, we walked on, still keeping in the shadow.

'Why not come in, papa?'

But he shook his head decisively at that.

'I cannot come in, Kate,' he said, his tone a little more soft and slow than usual. 'Nothing can be saved for us, and I cannot bear to see it done.'

'Papa, hadn't you better tell Mr. Keverne?'

He moved away from me with quick impatience.

'You don't know what you are speaking of, child. He has helped me too often. In very shame I could not seek his help again; he said, too, that it never should be given again. No, it must all go this time, and the sooner we get out of the country the better. Even if this fellow could be appeased, there are plenty more creditors to start forward. How's Leonard?'

'Better, papa,' I answered; those words thrilling through me—'The sooner we get out of the country the better.'

'And Rachel?'

'Almost broken-hearted. Poor Rachel! Oh, father, father, what can we do?' And I clung to him as if he really could have helped us all, even then.

'There's nothing to do,' he answered, moodily. 'The Fates have been against me all along, and *they* won't change.'

I could not persuade him to come in, even to rest; but I fetched him some sandwiches and wine, and I watched him take them; for we had left the shadow now, being no longer afraid of being seen by the men. And it all came into my thoughts, and my mind, and my heart, while I watched him; grieving to see his harassed face, and grieving to think of the old home going from him. I did not tell him of my thoughts. I only made him promise to stay in Penzance, until he received a note from home, sent by a trusty messenger. He did promise, and described what

papers I was to send him. Then we kissed each other, and he went away.

I wish to-morrow morning would dawn. I dread the four hours through which I must lie awake and think, before the household is astir again. I will go and see if Leonard is still sleeping, as he was when I left him two hours ago.

September 2nd, 1865.

Has this been more a sad day or a happy one for me? I cannot tell; I do not like even to wonder about it. When papa kissed me at his bed-room door just now, and called me his 'own brave-hearted little Kate,' I felt that was reward enough; but when Leonard drew my face down upon his pillow, and whispered just those ten quiet little words, I said to myself I would always recall them, if I ever felt anything but grateful in my heart for this day's work: 'God bless this act of yours, dear, to us all!'

How earnestly he said them! Oh, surely they went up to Heaven and pleaded for me. From this day, for five full long years to come, I am to be Rose Grey's governess, and live at the Manor with her and her mother and her uncle, and without Leonard and Rachel—No; I will not look among the shadows on the picture.

Early this morning I went to Trecothic, and asked Mrs. Grey and the squire if they would buy in just the things at home which papa and Leonard and Rachel were fond of, making it possible for them to live on there; and in return take me to be Rose's governess for five years, without salary, that I might so repay the debt. At first they would not hear of this arrangement; but, when they saw how deeply and sadly I was in earnest, they agreed; at least, the squire did, for the arrangement is to be made between him and myself, as it is he who will help us. Mrs. Grey said that her unwillingness to consent was caused by her wish for this plan. She was afraid of being too ready to accept what I might have offered only on impulse. If they could know how long and seriously I thought of it last night, they would not talk of *impulse*.

So once more the squire has helped my father; but he says it is no loan or gift this time, but just payment for very valuable services, and he means mine. Oh! I hope I may serve him faithfully, as well as gratefully! We thought Mr. Keverne would just buy the things papa and Rachel would choose, pay off the most pressing creditors, and let papa keep on the farm. But he did far, far more, and still seemed as if the debt were not sufficiently repaid. The farm is to be ours on a lease of five years, papa is still to be his agent, and every debt is to be paid in full; and my father, astonished at the squire's generosity, has determined not to be careless or extravagant any more. He

says he knows this is caused by his idleness and self-indulgence, and that it shall never happen again.

They all laughed heartily at my whim, but I would not be content without signing a proper witnessed agreement with the squire about this. I do not think, though, that he laughed himself ; and, before he gave me the paper, which he brought down to-night, he asked me very gravely if I were steadfast in my wish to sign it, and seriously to enter upon this as a solemn and binding engagement.

'Quite steadfast,' I answered, frankly meeting his searching eyes.

'Five years is a long time,' he said, still keeping back the pen from me. 'In those five years, Kate, you will grow from girlhood into womanhood. Do you feel that your purpose will not change as other things will change ?'

No, I knew it would not, and I took the paper eagerly.

'Now,' I said, laughing, as I passed it on to Leonard, 'I am bound—bound for five years.'

Then quite suddenly there came into my heart the deepest sense of what this friend had done for us, of what he was doing, and, most of all, of *how* he was doing it. There came the consciousness of how different my life would be during these coming years if he were not—just what he was ; and I turned to him with stupid, broken words of thanks. I think—I think he looked hurt and pained by them.

Papa and I lingered a few minutes with him in the porch. A strange, beautiful sky stretched over us. In the soft distant grey the moon rode among dainty little clouds edged with bright silver ; the stars shone down upon us, calm and tender. I think it was the quiet beauty of the night which made me feel so unaccountably sad.

Once more, and very earnestly, the squire spoke to me before he left. It was not too late even then, he said ; should he give me back my bond ? He would rather trust me without it, and I need not look upon myself as bound.

No, I would not take it. I would rather feel he held that paper. But I suppose I did not look so glad as I felt ; because, when I went back into the lamp-lit room, Leonard looked at me curiously.

'Is anything the matter, dear ?'

'Of course something is the matter, Len,'—for, when he questioned me so suddenly and anxiously, how could I help but answer him ?—'I feel my troubles, like Mrs. Gummidge, and they make me contrairy.'

Trecothick Manor, September 11th, 1865.

This is the first day I have dated from here, though I have been Rose's governess for a week. My father is steady and

industrious now, and surely he will never go back to the old sad ways. I am very happy here; as happy as I could be in any home that is not the dear old farm. Mrs. Grey often asks Rachel to come here, but she will not yet. Leonard says he wishes he could be as wise. I say I am glad he is more foolish. Yet perhaps his coming does make it a little more difficult just at first.

Mrs. Grey is most kind to me, most gentle and considerate; and, as for little Rose, she has already won her way into my very heart. Mr. Keverne, of course, is good to me, in just that old way of his, as if it would not be natural for him to be anything else. Mr. Etheridge comes to the Manor sometimes, but it does not seem to me that they are ever really glad to see him; yet what reason could they have for not being so? Even Mrs. Grey, who judges every one else so leniently, calls him indolent and self-engrossed. I never heard Mr. Keverne say anything against him until to-night, and then I can hardly say that he spoke against him; for he only laughingly quoted that vague line of Tennyson's,

'A young man will be wiser by-and-by.'

He speaks just as if he were twenty years older than Mr. Etheridge, yet his sister says he is only six-and-thirty. Still he is so different from Mr. Etheridge that I daresay he never will be able to appreciate him. He—Mr. Etheridge, I mean—came to-day to bid us good-bye; such a long good-bye. For four years! After he was gone to-night, the squire asked me once more, and more than ever gravely, if I repented signing that bond with him. I could only laugh. Surely he might see I do not, when I am so happy and contented. Then he asked me whether Mr. Etheridge knew that I had bound myself to my present engagement for five years. I told him yes, Mr. Etheridge knew it quite well, and had often laughed about it. But I thought the question rather odd too.

March 14th, 1869.

Since the day of my father's disappearance, a year ago, I have only written a few words now and then. What days had I to tell of but miserable and humiliating ones? And why live any of them twice over? The shock brought with it a deep, deep shame that was worse than all. That he *could* again have abused the trust placed in him, after the squire's long forbearance, and unacknowledged generosity! Then to go quietly away himself, beyond the reach of blame or punishment, and leave Rachel and Leonard to bear it all! For *he* could not know that Mr. Keverne would leave us nothing to bear but shame for our father, and would actually give his agency to Leonard. Think of

it! to my dear boy, who can do so little! Ah, but the squire knows that what he does he does with all the strength of his heart; and he not only helps him himself, but has engaged an assistant for him, who is strong and active and clever. And the squire represents the work always as Leonard's, only Leonard knows who does the chief; and oh, it is good to hear him talk of Mr. Keverne, though he says that, when he tries to thank him, the squire looks really hurt—just as he used to do, I suppose, when I would try to thank him, in that miserable time a year ago. So now I just thank him quietly in my heart. Nearly four or five years have passed—have passed as happily as I felt sure they would do, brightened by daily, hourly gifts, which those who give them do not even know they give. I almost forgot to record one fact: Mr. Etheridge is in England again—in Cornwall, too. He was in church this morning. I think he is handsomer than ever; quite different he looked from anyone else in church to-day. I daresay he will come here to-morrow.

March 27th, 1869.

How changed everything is to me since Paul Etheridge came back! There is a wonderful joy in my heart; a wide, delicious sunshine on my way. He says he came down to Cornwall again, not to recall the old scenes, but the old faces; and when he says it, he makes me feel exactly what he means. He is going to paint my portrait. I wonder how he can care to do so after spending years among those marvellous pictures he tells me of. I wonder whether I *ought* to idle away so much time as he will require for this. He has a month to spend here resting from his long, hard studies; then he has an order to execute for a Spanish picture, and that will take him to Spain for a year. He dreads the loneliness, he says; but why should his busy life in Spain be lonelier than his rooms at Rynance? I will not ask him this again, because when I asked before, he told me what—what I think could scarcely have been true.

April 19th, 1869.

My picture is finished, and Leonard is so anxious for it—offers any price within his power. Poor Leonard! It is more like my idea of Rosalind in 'As You Like It,' than my idea of myself. I told Paul he forgot whom he was painting, because we talked so much about Shakespeare and the musical glasses. How seriously he took my words! It was just as my last sitting ended, and we were criticising the picture. I was telling him that my eyes were never so beautiful as those, when, quite suddenly, he turned my face and met them with his own, telling

me he would give Leonard the portrait if I would give him the original.

I cannot write what he said, nor what I answered, until I reminded him of my engagement with Mrs. Grey. He only laughed at the idea of that being really binding, as I guessed he would ; but *I* know it is binding. There are only a few months to run now, but I will keep my part of the agreement, as Mr. Keverne has kept his. Could I break my solemn word, even for Paul's pleading ? And in all the world what could there be for me harder to resist than that ? Will it ever be harder than it was to-day ? I can hear now the entreaty in his voice—its passionate, vehement entreaty. I wish he had not asked me to break my promise. I wish he would trust me, and come back for me when I am free to go with him. But he will not hear of that. He says he cannot bear that year in Spain without me. I could trust *him* for years. I wish men were as patient and trustful as women are. Rachel says that, when they are so at all, they are ten times more so than women. Perhaps so. I daresay Mr. Keverne would be, if anyone ever tried him. But Paul could not. Oh, what would I not give to be ready to go with him, where and when he will, without feeling that I act meanly and deceitfully ? Five months yet—one hundred and thirty-six days. I have counted them many times. One hundred and thirty-six days.

April 21st, 1869.

I have told Paul—oh ! what else could I say in answer to his pleading, loving words ?—that, if Mr. Keverne and Mrs. Grey will release me, I will go with him to Spain. In the old church on the cliffs, at the Lizard, he wants us to be married this very month. He is in the library now, speaking to Mr. Keverne, and I am waiting for him. Oh ! suppose Mr. Keverne says I cannot be released unless I voluntarily break my solemn word, and make my written promise a lie ? But he cannot say it ; he is too generous. He *could* not refuse me, now that my last year is drawing to an end .

Paul came up the stairs with such a quick and angry step that I knew what he had to say to me even before I saw him. Mr. Keverne followed him, more slowly.

'Mr. Keverne will not release you, Kate,' he said, a passion in his eyes which spoke even more contemptuously than his tone. 'Mr. Keverne considers that you have signed away your independence in this matter. The legality or illegality of such a deed does not disturb his notions of honour.'

I looked from Paul to Mr. Keverne, my cheeks burning. His firm and quiet answer to my mute question was a decisive negative ; and the cold refusal fell as sorely on my hope as on Paul's scornful vehemence.

Mr. Etheridge had only a few months to wait, the squire said ; surely that could not dismay him. Mr. Etheridge had always known of the engagement between Mrs. Grey and Miss Carew, and it was strange that he could tempt her to break her word. Did he understand that, tempted so, Miss Carew herself wished to cancel it ?

I answered yes, but very timidly, because his words, though they hurt me, did not seem wrong or unkind. Hotly Paul broke in, would *he* like to wait a year for the desired consummation of any hope of his ? He would scarcely be so cruelly hard on others, if he had ever been tried himself.

I saw the squire's lip shake a little, but he answered as steadily as before.

'There is no cruelty in my decision, Kate, though perhaps you will never understand that ; no cruelty, Etheridge. With such an end in view, surely you will have patience and courage for these few months !'

Then he left us, and Paul paced the room impatiently. I forget all he urged. He said Mr. Keverne had no right to keep that most illegal bond, especially as I was not of age when I signed it ; that it was madness for me to care what he said when he had no authority over me, no claim upon me ; that he was a grasping, selfish tyrant ; that it was only Paul himself in all the world to whom I ought to listen, and that I *should* do so if I loved him as he loved me.

And then—because I said this was not so—he took me suddenly in his arms, and whispered what I must do *because* I loved him. But I could not listen ; oh ! I could not. I hated myself for feeling so glad and proud of what he said ; I hated myself for feeling so ready to do his bidding—so strong in my love for him, so weak in other ways. I pressed my hands upon my ears at last, and left him ; but his words haunt me still.

April 23rd, 1869.

I wish no one in the house would notice me. Are they wondering why Paul left so hurriedly yesterday ? Are they wondering that I do not grieve more ? Quite early yesterday he came and bade good-bye to us all ; and when the squire, in his kindly, cordial way, begged him to come to Trecothie again if he possibly could through those months of waiting, I felt my face grow as white as death. But Paul answered with a few gay words of thanks. How could he ? I went with him down the park, and we parted at the gates, without one sob or tear. I watched him ride up the narrow lane, where the trees met above his head. I watched his horse step on over the bars of sunlight and the bars of shade. I watched him out upon the heath again, galloping on towards where a bank of soft, white clouds hung low on

the horizon. Then I came back into the house, and Rose and I had some rare games together. In the evening, before the lamps were lighted, I went into the long, shadowy drawing-room. Mr Keverne, at a distant window, sat idly looking out. He often now sits in that idle, thoughtful way between the lights. Mrs. Grey caught enough of the fading daylight to go on with her knitting. I sat down at the first window, with my back almost turned to her. Minute after minute I waited, gathering ease and indifference into my voice ; then, turning a little, I asked her if she would allow me a holiday on the morrow. For the first time in all the years I have been here, she hesitated to grant my request, and my heart began to beat, both in fear and rebellion. But just then the squire, turning from his seat to look at us, spoke pleasantly to his sister.

‘By all means let us have a holiday to-morrow, dear. I shall be away till late, so you will want the little one’s company all to yourself. Let us have a holiday by all means.’

After that Mrs. Grey quite willingly gave me the liberty I wanted. But I wish the night had not to come first. One’s thoughts sometimes—*some* thoughts—trouble one in solitude, and in the dark.

May 21st, 1869.

I have not written a word for four whole weeks, because I felt that I could not do so unless I passed over that one day when I begged a holiday for such an unsuspected purpose ; and it seemed mean to do that. Now I will write it. I am going presently—very soon—to leave off keeping a diary, but I will not leave off just because I am too cowardly to write of that day.

Rose and I spent rather a sad—at any rate a very quiet—morning together. My heart yearned oddly to the child who has been my close companion for nearly five years. The clinging love seemed most sweet and precious to me ; and when I left her at the gate I had to hurry out of sight, with the hot, sharp tears rushing up into my eyes. From where I waited on the moor to catch the Helstone omnibus on its way from the Lizard, I could just see the black and white gables of the farm ; so I shut my eyes while I listened for the wheels, for I dared not think of Leonard. He and Rachel would be at dinner now. I knew exactly where they would be sitting in the pleasant room, and how the scent of my violets would come through the windows, and cling about them. Perhaps they were talking of me—No, I dared not think of that. How many years was it since Leonard and I had driven to Rynance on one summer evening, and seen Paul sketching ? Oh, what a long, long time !

Almost before I was aware, the four fleet horses drew up beside me as I sat upon the heather, and I took my place in the



omnibus. In a few minutes the road across the heath had turned, and I could not have seen the old farm gables if I had tried. At Helstone I took another omnibus on to Camborne Station, and there I got quietly into an empty carriage, and knew that when next I stopped Paul would meet me. Yet I turned my face on the arm of my seat, and tried not to think. I could not even look out on the familiar way, because it reminded me of those old journeys Leonard and I used to take once in every holidays; travelling grandly up to Truro together, with a very small box of clothes and a very large hamper of presents from the farm, to visit the old friend to whose house I was going now; from whose house I was to walk quietly away next morning, to meet Paul at the church where we were to be married.

At Truro Station I looked out, with one searching glance which took in all the platform. In a moment Paul was beside me, glad and smiling.

'All right!' he whispered. 'Done well and cleverly, my dearest. We have nothing to fear now. No luggage to look after? What a blessing! Your friend has ordered all she thinks you will need, for we cannot venture to write for your boxes from Trecothick until to-morrow is over, and we are safely away home.'

Side by side we walked from the station, and there, just outside, a dog-cart waited, with a pair of horses. I felt the start Paul gave. I felt my own breath quicken when I saw it.

'Kate,' Mr. Keverne said, meeting us close beside it, and looking down gravely into my startled face, 'I am going back to Trecothick, and you had better come with me. You will be too late to catch the return omnibus to-night.'

Oh, how my paltry courage staggered before him! The few defiant words I uttered were a great, great effort, and I know my eyes were wide and miserable when I raised them to his face.

'Will you come, Kate?'

But I could answer him then in sudden, fearless passion. I was not his servant. I would never return with him.

'I think, Mr. Etheridge,' said the squire, calmly, 'that it would be wiser for you to go alone, and wait through these few months. You know that Kate will not change while you are true; therefore, what do you fear?'

Then Paul spoke, hotly and scornfully. I think even if we had not been alone, he could scarcely have stayed his wrathful words. I could not distinguish the squire's, they were so low, but I heard one sentence:

'Not unless you are afraid that the stories which have reached me of your life abroad may reach her too when you have gone. If I had cared to tell her, I should have told her before this night. You know why I take her back, and you know that the length of this separation depends upon yourself.'

Oh! Paul, if I could put have comforted you then, when you

looked so white and angry, and when your lips shook until they could not frame the words they would have uttered !

'Will you come, Kate?' the squire asked again, looking quickly away from him. But I only stood close to Paul, whispering that I would not leave him. Gradually he grew quiet and cold.

'You had better go, perhaps,' he said to me, almost chillily. 'Mr. Keverne seems to think we are both wholly and entirely in his power.'

'Mr. Etheridge,' said the squire—and though his words were a very whisper, and I in my unutterable grief had turned my head away, yet I heard each one distinctly—'you know that is unjust ; but let it pass. Through the five months that you will wait, no word of blame of you shall pass my lips to her.'

Paul laughed oddly, and his whole face was different from what it had been when we met only a few minutes before.

'Good-bye, Kate,' he said ; no longer meeting scornfully the squire's sad, grave eyes ; 'good-bye, Kate.' Ah ! but the pain of parting blanched his lips as the words passed them ; and I could not bear it, but crept closer, whispering, in untold love and sorrow, that I would be true to him always, whether we parted or not.

'The parting is kindly arranged for us,' Paul said, laughing ironically, but still not looking beyond me ; 'of course for *our* sakes. Mr. Keverne uses his power most generously, Kate, and we will obey him as slavishly as he expects to be obeyed. He orders you to go back with him, and you shall go. He orders me to wait his pleasure, and I shall wait.'

'Only for a little time, Paul,' I whispered, my voice shaking in my great grief ; but I did not mind, because Mr. Keverne had gone out of hearing, and left us two alone now ; 'and I will be so true !'

'No, only for a little time, my love. Good-bye.'

I drew away from Mr. Keverne's touch when he attempted to help me up to the seat beside his in the dog-cart ; and shrank as far from him as I could through the drive, which lasted such a long, long time. I looked with aching eyes across the barren country, and counted the chimneys of the mines, which stood so bleak and desolate against the sky ; and my thoughts went fast and far with Paul. I hated the drive, yet I was sorry when we reached the inn, half-way, where the squire called for his own rested horses, and left the hired ones he had been driving ; and where he—just in his old, firm, quiet way—made me take the wine he brought me, and which I determined not to touch. The twilight gathered, deepened, and was hushed and silenced into night, before we felt our own beautiful scenery was around us again, and the dismal, silent mines left behind. I could just dimly see the quiet figure sitting high beside me. I wished he

would speak to me ; would give me an opportunity of uttering a little of the anger and the pride which fought with the great sorrow at my heart. But he only drove me on, silently and safely, through the night. Over the moor at last. Daintily the beautiful horses stepped on the short, elastic turf. Was it really only this afternoon that I had sat here waiting ? Oh ! thank God for the darkness that lay upon the dear old home ! Mr. Keverne bent his head against the bleak night wind, tilting his hat a little over his eyes--the gentle, fearless eyes. I was glad I could not read them when the horses drew up on the sweep at Trecothick, and Mrs. Grey came to the hall-door to greet her brother. With an easy little apology, he told her he had been detained, and so had detained me too ; he had thought I might just as well drive home as walk. This he said aloud, for his servants to hear ; and then in a moment I understood his reason for driving without a groom.

I told Mrs. Grey the whole truth that night, of course. She spoke gently to me, though my own words were impatient and resentful. And then that strange and dreary day was over. I was back in my old place once more, and Paul was far away. That is, as I said, four weeks ago. I will not write anything more of it. I have heard from Paul. He is not going to work very hard on his Spanish picture, he says, because he has a whole year before him. He writes quite cheerfully, but says very hard things of Mr. Keverne.

June 8th, 1869.

How hot it is ! Leonard talks of beginning the squire's harvest at once. It is fun to hear Rose demurely discussing with him the management of her uncle's farm, and Leonard's own too ; in which, I think, she takes even a greater interest. We spent this afternoon there--she and I--and it was so pleasant, only that Rachel had heard some false story of Paul, just as untrue and improbable as those ridiculous tales people have whispered about his life in Italy, where he was all the time working so hard. How wicked and unjust it is ! How can Rachel listen ? Above all, how can she repeat them to me ? Yet she does it so anxiously, and so tenderly, that I cannot blame her ; can only contradict them with all my heart and strength. I wish Paul knew, and would hush them for ever by a word of his own. He seems to be quite busy now at his picture. I do not mind the shortness of his letters. I think of him working and remembering me, while the beautiful picture grows under his hand. I do not fret that he has only time to say so little to me. His words are so precious that they satisfy me always, however few they are. There is Rose below the window calling me. 'Coming, darling !' Not three months now, and the winning voice will never rouse me

from my thoughts, and woo me to fresh pleasures. What a wrench the parting will be ! Mrs. Grey keeps very anxiously asking me to stay with them until they leave at Christmas, but I never will ; besides, the parting would be even harder then ; and I could not for many other reasons. Oh ! after Mr. Keverne's cruelty to me on that one day, I *never* could consent to stay longer than the time I am bound to stay. I always say that to myself, and I always, always mean it. We have heard from papa. He says he is getting a rich man. Think of it ! And he wants us to go out to Australia to him some day ; but I hope he will come instead. Rachel cannot bear the thought of going, and Leonard's love for the dear old home deepens year by year. And mine ? I do not know. I think it is a bad thing for me to have lived here so long, in the luxury of love and wealth and kindness ; but I would go out to my father to-morrow if he said he wished it. I, who have committed this very fault, and betrayed the trust of my employer !

June 21st, 1869.

Such a strange letter from Paul ! What does he mean ? Does he forget that I shall be free so soon ? Does he forget how I whispered to him, when we parted, that I would be true ? I wish it had not come ; I wish it had got lost in the post.

July 18th, 1869.

It is all over, and I can only feel as if the world were full of false and shallow hearts. The paper came to Mr. Keverne, but it was his sister who gave it to me, then left me, that I might be alone when I found the paragraph. *Married !* Married to a Spanish heiress ! Paul, my own first love, to whom I would have been true for all my life ! Is the world really full of hollow, faithless hearts ? These thoughts may seem wicked to me some day, but oh, they come so readily, so naturally now ! In whom can I ever again believe ? If I had been resolute on that one day in Truro — No, my pride will not let me finish that thought. And only this morning in church I was recalling Leonard's words to me, ' God bless this act of yours, dear, to us all ! ' I thought the words were earnest as a prayer, and so I leaned upon them, half unconsciously. But have not the consequences of that act of mine been hard and cruel ? How could the squire have kept me in bondage, and let Paul go ?

July 25th, 1869.

No one here speaks to me of Paul ; no one angers or hurts me by presuming I am either suffering or fretting. Yet, in some indefinable way, I feel that they are kinder to me, if that be

possible. Leonard has spoken to me of him this morning, and though he did say, rather angrily, that I ought to be grateful for having been saved from binding myself for ever to anyone so heartless and selfish; yet he spoke so wisely and gently, that I saw it all a little brighter, after the tears which his words brought—tears which he kissed away, just as he used to kiss them when I was a little child, and he had always the strength and power to comfort me.

August 11th, 1869.

The time is very near for my going, and day by day the love and kindness which I meet with here are dearer to me. I wish the parting with Rose were over, because I dread it so. Still I cannot stay, as they wish me to stay, until Captain Grey comes for them. I *could not*. Perhaps it is really only pride, as Rachel says, which prevents me. I suppose it is. What but pride could rise in my heart in such quick rebellion at the idea?

September 2nd, 1869.

My last night at Trecothick. Dark and clear the fir-trees stand against the cold, sunset sky; just above them shines the young crescent moon, and one star comes shyly out alone to peep. Quite plainly I can hear what our fishermen speak of as the 'calling of the sea.' How sad it is! almost like the echo of some cry in my own heart. Rose is in bed at last. She has been softly crying—here within my arms—for hours. How cheerless and empty the room feels! And yet I stay here by my own wish. Mrs. Grey came herself to fetch me into the drawing-room, but I cannot go. She saw I wanted to be alone, and so she left me, only begging me to join them presently. I did want to be alone, but I did not fancy I should feel so solitary as I do. I cannot bear to go into my own room; the very sight of my packed boxes is as bad as a good-bye. I wish Mrs. Grey would just once more ask me to stay here until she leaves, as she has so often asked me before. But of course she never will again, because I have always refused so decisively and unhesitatingly. Even if she proposed it, Mr. Keverne would not let her ask me. I can well remember how coldly he said, when she spoke of it last, 'You forget that Kate would not have stayed with us through these five years if she had not bound herself.'

*Bound!* Oh, how I used to hate the word! Now I wish I had been bound for another year. I have not seen Mr. Keverne to-day. He went out shooting early this morning, and had not returned when we dined. I remember that he had been shooting when he came to the farm on this night five years ago. How strange it is to think of my home life before that day—so sweet and unruffled! Will it seem as sweet and unruffled to me when

I go back to it? It is too late now for me to hope for Mrs. Grey to come in and ask me to stay—far too late. I wish I could not see the bracken bending and swaying on the heath, and I wish the world did not look so chill and lonely off there where the upland meets the grey evening sky. The solitude here is unbearable. I must go down, even if I cannot stay. It will be a minute's change, and a minute's rest from these dismal thoughts. I have not courage to go to Rose again; it would only bring another parting.

I opened the drawing-room door very softly. The room was brilliantly lighted, and my eyes—so tired to-night—were dazzled by the sudden glare. I knew that my face looked so small and white and pinched that it might well startle any one who saw me coming in silently so; and Mrs. Grey, who had looked up from her book with a bright smile of greeting, suddenly rose.

'Dear,' she said—and for the first time she put her kind arms round me, and kissed my lips—'I have been waiting for you. I would not have the tea brought in until you came. I will ring now; but I wish you would go and ask Mervyn to come—will you? I think he must be in the library, though I have not heard him ring for lights. I fancy he is tired, or he would have joined me after dinner.'

'Please let—' I began; but she went on, and did not seem to hear me.

'Would you mind fetching him? I shall be so glad, Kate, because I want to give my order. I intend to have a pleasant, substantial tea, as we none of us cared for dinner. If Mervyn is not in the library, he may be out smoking.' So she talked on, cheerfully and kindly, till I went.

No one answered my quiet tap upon the library door, so I passed in. The room was almost dark, but I could see Mr. Keverne standing at one of the low windows; standing quite still, and looking out among the dusky shadows of the September twilight, as I had often lately seen him look. The carpet was so thick, and the wind rising so noisily, that I was close beside him before he heard me. Then, in his surprise, a sudden shiver ran through him, and the hand he laid on mine shook like the leaves outside.

'Kate, why did you come in so—like part of a broken dream?'

I could not help it; I laid my other hand on his. Mine was much the smaller, much the weaker, yet it stilled at once the trembling fingers it touched.

'What are you come to tell me, Kate?'

'Mrs. Grey is waiting tea for you and me. She sent me to fetch you.'

'She sent you to fetch me—that is why you came?'

'Yes; that is why I came. I think Mrs. Grey kindly

wishes us to have a pleasant tea together, because it is my last night.'

'Hush ! This last night, to which you have for years been looking forward, is very bitter to me. Go back into the light and cheerfulness, my child. I will come presently.'

I did not stand higher than his shoulder, and I looked white and thin, as if I had had a long illness ; yet, with my own eyes dry, I could see tears gather in his, and my voice was steady while his faltered.

'Presently will do, Mr. Keverne ; I will wait for you.'

I took my hands quietly away, and looked out from my corner of the window. How wide, and still, and sad the park looked ! The firs, against the faint western light, bent their heads before the strong sea-wind. I pictured how the waves would be tossing and sobbing among the rocks at Rynance—the same waves which Paul and I and Leonard had watched on that summer night more than five years ago. How beautiful that evening had been ! Yet I knew now that I would rather be just where I was, looking out upon the wind-swayed trees—we two alone, half hidden even from each other, I waiting with him in the gloom until he chose to take me into the light and warmth.

'Kate, what is there different in your face and voice to-night ? Are you not glad because this hour has come at last ? Are you not glad because to-night I have to give you back your freedom ?'

'No.'

'Not glad, dear ?'

I could not answer the questioning look in his eyes, because I could not hold back my tears any longer. Childishly, I covered my face, and then—I think he knew the truth.

'My love,' he whispered, raising my face, after a long, long silence, 'I *cannot* give you back your freedom.'

And he did not. He will not even give me back the old paper with our signatures upon it, because, he says, it brought him his life's happiness.

In His infinite compassion, God *has* blessed this act of mine to all of us, as Leonard said ; yet it never could have been so but for a heart and will that were truer and braver than my own.

## ALL THROUGH ARETHUSA.

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MY mother's cottage lay in the shadow of Beechhurst, and scarcely seemed more my home than was the great red house where I was always made so welcome. Sir Arnold Warlake had been like a father to me ever since my mother, in her girl-widowhood, had come to live at the cottage in Ford Valley; and so from childhood my life seemed linked with Marion's, for she was Sir Arnold's only child, and my constant playfellow. She was a little fairy princess to me. Every beautiful child of whom I read, had Marion's face and form, while of all the fanciful legends which she loved to tell me, she was to me the heroine. Hour after hour I used to linger with her, drinking in every word uttered by the child who, though younger by two years, was so much cleverer and wiser and brighter than myself.

So winning was she, that no wonder I should be devoted to her, and should haunt every spot where—if she were not with me—I guessed that she might be. And the favourite spot of all, to her and to me, was the shadowy bank above the river, where the two aspens bent and touched the Arethusa fountain. Here we would rest upon the moss, chatting to the little river's rippling flow; talking sometimes bravely of the life that lay before us—as children will; sometimes of the books we read, wandering from the thoughts of others to our own; sometimes wondering over problems which older and wiser heads have never solved; and sometimes only idly chatting of the beauty of our summer day. And at such times it would be, perhaps, that, at my entreaty, Marion would tell me the story which seemed to belong to the place. I think, if she had told it me only once in all her life, I should have remembered it just as I remember it now—so delightedly did I listen to all words of hers, and so lovingly did I afterwards recall them. But that story of the Arethusa fountain had certainly been told very often, to the river's gentle, laughing flow.



'Again, George?' Marion would say, looking up demurely into my expectant face. 'How fond you must be of the story!' Was not any story sweet to me from her lips? 'I shall tell it to you just once more to-day—for the last time.'

'If for the last time, make it very long,' I would answer, avoiding the slightest appearance of a smile, for fear it should provoke her into meaning it to be really the last time, which she never did.

Well, George, this was how it was—the fresh young voice would put on a new importance here, and the flashing eyes grow serious. 'There was once upon a time an old man called Oceanus, and he had a beautiful, beautiful daughter, just more lovely than you can ever fancy, because you've never seen anything half so pretty, and never will, because she was *Mythology*. I don't suppose her father loved her very much, after all, for he let her go away from him to be a maid-of-honour to Diana, who used to hunt a great deal, and had lots of lovely maids-of-honour who used to hunt with her. I don't think any gentlemen ever went with them, but I'm not sure. One day, when they were all coming home from hunting, this beautiful girl—Arethusa, you know—got to be by herself somehow. I daresay she had a habit of falling behind by herself, like you when you walk home from morning school. Presently she came to a river, and it looked so sparkling and delicious—like this one now—that she thought she would like to bathe. But there's a god in every river, you know; and though he doesn't take any notice of us because we can't see him, and because we are only just earthly people, still, of course, he took great notice of Arethusa, and thought her the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen—as she was. When she stopped, and thought she'd bathe, he began to speak to her. But she was dreadfully frightened—oh, dreadfully!—and, when she looked at him, she turned and ran away as fast as she could. But the god of the river ran, too, over the fields and hedges and mountains, and though he saw she wanted to get away, and though, of course, he knew she could not run as fast as he could—and though he *was* a god—he never had the honourableness to give up chasing her. I don't think those gods were all very great in their deeds, do you know, George, though they grew so famous. So the god of the river kept getting nearer and nearer, and breathing harder and harder, and poor little Arethusa kept getting tired and tired; and yet he didn't quite catch her. At last, just when she felt she was going to fall, and knew she couldn't run another single step, she suddenly remembered how clever her mistress was. So she stopped, for half a moment, and prayed to her. And, do you know, all in an instant, just as she stood, Diana changed her into a fountain. Then Alpheus came up to her, with great, swift steps, and there he saw her, beautiful as ever, but still and cold, and only a fountain of pure water. He was

so heart-broken, and so full of love, that he flowed on with her in one stream ; because, you see, he was a river-god, and it was easy for him to change his course. But Diana—wherever she was—knew what had happened, and felt she had not properly answered poor little Arethusa's prayer ; so she made a secret way under the earth, and let the fountain-waters flow there, unknown to Alpheus, and rise again in an island a long, long way off. But even *she* had not guessed how clever the river-god was. As soon as ever he found out that he could not go with Arethusa, he followed her under the sea—down I don't know how deep below the sea—and came out just exactly in the same place as she did. And then the river flowed on and on, and in the very middle stood the fountain across it.'

'That was, of course, the very thing Alpheus liked,' I would say, looking at Marion. 'He could flow down to her and kiss her, and dance past her. Of course he goes on doing this for ever. He need never pass without the kiss, and, as he has to be always passing, of course he likes it very much. Perhaps she grew to love him a little by degrees ?'

'I don't know,' said Marion, gravely. 'But the real fountain cannot be prettier than this one, can it, George ? Grandpapa had that marble figure put there, because, you see, the fountain almost stops the river, going quite across it like the real one did.'

I would not stop Marion to question which of the fountains was the more real, because my ignorance of any part of the story, except what she chose to tell me, was to be most evident.

'So grandpapa named it the Arethusa fountain,' she would end, with her little head on one side, and her eyes fixed on the marble figure below us. 'It is pretty, isn't it ? And I am fond of it ; are you ?'

The question would be added, only provokingly, for she knew how I loved every spot around her home, and this best of all. To-night, as I sit in the crowded hospital, thousands of miles away from it—my eyes pained with the sight of haggard, wounded faces, my ears aching with the sound of dying words and cries—I feel hungry for the touch of the fresh, cool turf, and the sound of the rippling water.

My school-days were over, and on the morrow I should leave home for the first time. With my heart full of the brave resolutions which I had made for my college career, I set out for Beechhurst to bid Marion good-bye. She strolled with me through the sunny park until we reached the Arethusa fountain. And before we had parted there I had told her how I loved her ; how I had loved her all my life ; how my heart would be there through all my absence ; with her through my life. And she—the girl of sixteen, who knew nothing of the great world into which I was going, and who had learned nothing of the power of her own beauty or the depth of her own heart—just

whispered simply, in the summer silence, that she loved me dearly too, and would be true to me for ever, though I went away.

And so our troth was plighted under the whispering aspens, and never one cloud of doubt or mistrust shadowed the sunshine of that promise.

Marion had prophesied that my days at Oxford would pass quickly, because I should work so hard ; but she was not right. My first vacation seemed wearily long in coming. I was so selfish and exacting in my love, that her letters, though so dear to me—so prized and cherished—did not satisfy me for the loss of herself. I longed daily and hourly to see her and to hear her voice, and my solitary dreams of her so entirely made up the sum of my present enjoyment that I never thought of pursuing another. So I worked on—worked indefatigably—to win my darling ; but still the days crept but slowly by. Such long letters I wrote her ! Often since have I felt that they must have wearied her sadly, but then I never dreamed of that. I knew what unutterable pleasure it was to me to receive even a few lines from her ; and though I did not dream it would be so great a one to her, still she said she loved to hear from me ; and, when I was writing to her, it was almost like parting to put down my pen.

I was always solitary among my fellow-students ; so nervously sensitive and reserved, and so keenly dreading a cold word or look, that, while I longed for the friendship of men, I shrank from seeking it, and often even repelled it, by a coldness which I knew to be self-doubt, though others could never understand it so. At last that first term had worn away, and I went home, my heart filled with love and hope. How beautiful Marion had grown ! What music was her sweet low voice to me when she told me that my absence had seemed very long to her, but that she was quite happy now I had come.

She was a child no longer. But, while I saw the changes in her, my heart leaped with joy to see that in her love for me there was no change at all.

‘Yes, I am grown up now,’ she said, half laughing and half sighing, ‘and I am not glad. I do not want to be obliged to go out into the world, George.’

‘You will like it,’ I answered, with a throb of jealous fear, and a look of unutterable love into her face. ‘You have never seen anything of the world yet, have you, Marion ?’

‘Nothing except what Ford Valley holds ; and why should I,’ she asked gently, ‘when it holds all my world ? I have no friends beyond. I have not even a relative, you know, except Guy Cassilis.’

‘Yes,’ I answered, shortly, for, with a strange perversity, I always silenced Marion with my own silence when she spoke of this cousin, whom neither she nor I had ever seen. I could not tell

why it was that I shrank from hearing the name of Guy Cassalis from her lips, but it had been always so, even when we were children together.

So happy were we through that vacation—happy both of us, as I love to remember now—that the last day came with strides, to find us in the fulness of our content.

‘I shall work harder than ever, Marion,’ I said, standing with her hand in mine, ‘and I shall write every day, and think of you always—always.’

‘If so, you will not work well, even if you work hard, George,’ she said, smiling a little.

‘Oh, Marion, isn’t it hard to part from those we love?’

‘But we must not expect life to be all easy.’

‘You *are* happy, Marion?’ I questioned, with intense eagerness, as I held her face between my hands.

‘Yes, very happy.’

‘Really happy, Marion?’ I whispered, breathlessly.

‘Because I am engaged to you, George?’ she asked, tears glistening in her truthful eyes. ‘Yes, really happy.’

Then, pressing a long kiss upon her lips, I left her once again. Harder than ever I worked then, as I had said I should; worked to be worthy of the high calling I had chosen, and of Marion’s love. And one day, when an unexpected honour had been bestowed upon me, I suddenly made up my mind to go down to Ford Valley and surprise my mother and Marion, not only with my presence, but with my good news too. I should have a hurried journey, and but a few hours to spend with them; but would not those few hours, and my mother’s and Marion’s joy and congratulations, be reward enough? I walked hastily from the station in the late spring twilight, and quietly opened the garden-gate at home, seeing joyfully that a light burned in my mother’s sitting-room. Suppose Marion should be with her now! Suppose I should open the door upon them both, and hear their greeting words mingled in their glad surprise!

I turned the handle softly and looked into the room. My mother sat alone in her low chair before the fire, and her dear, kind eyes were a little drooped and sad.

‘Mother! dear mother!’

She rose, her face all changed, and, as I told her of my triumph, she flushed like a girl, and whispered her joy in words almost too low for me to hear.

‘Mother, darling,’ I said—she was making tea after my story was over, and all her loving, anxious questions had been answered—‘I must go to see Marion now; I will come back to tea, for I need not return to Oxford till two o’clock in the morning.’

‘So soon!’ she said, a shadow falling over her face. ‘Can you not stay with me one day, George?’

‘No, mother dear. This first success of mine must not make me self-indulgent.’

‘Then, George,’ she said, with rather wistful eagerness, ‘you need not shorten those few hours with me.’

‘Not go to Marion! Why, mother, would you have me leave Ford Valley without seeing Marion?’

‘Just this once,’ she pleaded, tears gathering in her eyes. ‘Just this once, George?’

Could I? No, not even for my mother; and I was leaving the room when she called me back in a quick, pained voice.

‘George, George, stay with me, my dear! Marion is not at home. I met her going out this evening, to stay where there is a great ball to-night. She will not have returned even when you leave me in the morning.’

‘You saw her, mother?’ I questioned, eagerly, when the first sharp disappointment was over, and I was sitting beside her once more. ‘And did she look very beautiful?’

‘Very beautiful.’

‘And was the good old squire with her? Has he gone back to gaiety and dissipation now, for his pet’s sake? Oh, mother, tell me more of her? What did she say?’

‘Nothing to-day, dear. She did not see me.’

‘Nor Sir Arnold?’

‘He was not there, George,’ said my mother, quietly.

‘Then who was with Marion?’

‘Captain Cassilis.’

Such an odd silence fell upon us both, that I dared not raise my eyes to meet my mother’s.

‘George,’ she asked, as the weight fell heavier upon my heart, ‘did you not know that he was here?’

‘No. Marion has never thought to mention it. How long has he been here?’

‘Some weeks,’ she answered, very slowly.

‘And they go out together?’

‘Yes; but they are cousins.’

‘Ah, yes, they are cousins; and why should they not go out together? Come, mother, let us celebrate my triumph together—we two. You were glad to hear of it, weren’t you?’

‘Glad!’

‘Then, mother, this is recompense enough.’

I went back in the chilly morning, my eyes resting to the last on the house among the beeches, and, when I could see it no more, closing in an utter weariness.

That very afternoon came one of Marion’s dear, bright letters, but there was no mention of her cousin’s name throughout. I held the paper long between my trembling fingers, wondering should I write to her and ask her of Guy Cassilis, or should I imitate her silence, feeling that it was caused by utter in-

difference? I could do neither. I must speak to her while I could look into the face I loved, and read its truth. I would not try to take her by surprise again. I wrote and told her I should be home for a few hours soon after my letter; and once more I took the hurried journey, but this time without the buoyant hope which had been with me on my last.

It was in the bright spring noonday, as I walked from the station, that I met Marion in the pleasant little grove of beeches which gave its name to her home. Before either of us had uttered one word she was held closely to my beating heart, from which all doubt and all suspicion had vanished at sight of her. It was she who spoke first, looking up almost shyly into my joyous face.

'It seemed so odd for you to be coming home, George. I was so surprised.'

'Were you glad? And were you coming to meet me, dearest?'

'Yes.'

'You heard of my last journey?' I asked, almost shrinkingly.

'Yes, I heard. I was out all that night, George, dancing, while you travelled to tell us of your great triumph. Did I not always say you would be a great man? So great and good that—that—the love you win ought to be great and good too.'

'While I work, my darling,' I said, quickly, 'it is right for you to enjoy the gaiety which is yours by right. I love to hear of your enjoyment, Marion, but it surprised me to find that Captain Cassilis was here. You did not tell me of your cousin's visit. Why?'

'I do not know,' she answered, a strange weariness falling over her face, 'unless it was that I would not vex you more than—I cannot help doing.'

'Marion, darling,' I whispered, timidly touching her sad face, 'why should that vex me?'

'I—I don't know. He has gone. We need not speak of him.'

'Gone!' How glad I was to hear that word! And without a question more of him, we walked on to my mother's cottage, to spend the happy day together.

It was a happy day, although there was something among us which there had never been before—not a constraint exactly, but a thoughtful tenderness which was almost pathetic.

I bade my mother 'good-bye' before I took Marion home, as Beechhurst was on my way to the station. Then we started together, Marion and I, in the still silence of the starlit night, stopping where the little wood opens upon the lawn.

'Dear,' I said, reading her face under the quiet stars, 'have you been happy lately?'

'No,' she answered, with a sadness against which she seemed to be struggling; 'I must tell you all to-night, George; I cannot let you go until I have told you how I have—doubted.'

'Doubted love!' I echoed, trying to laugh. 'Doubted whom?'

'I have doubted,' she whispered, looking up beyond my face to the stars above us, 'myself.'

'But is it over now?' I asked, my voice trembling in its passionate entreaty.

'No,' she whispered; and I saw her fingers locked together and pressed in pain.

The word was so low, and the white face so still, that I scarcely felt I had understood.

'Oh, Marion, do not tell me!'

'Yes, George; let me tell you now, or I can never do so. I have felt that my love for you was not what you thought it, and not what you deserved.'

'But now,' I asked, my lips almost too stiff to frame the words, 'that feeling is over.'

'Last night he went,' whispered Marion, with the far-off look still in her eyes; 'let us never speak of him again.'

'You had told him of our engagement?' I questioned, pitilessly.

'He had known it before; but—yes, I told him, George, and he—he went away last night.'

'He should have gone before,' I said, in angry misery.

'Why?' asked Marion, with a strange, simple sadness. 'I knew of our engagement; I could not forget it, George.'

'I drew her nearer to my heart, kissing her passionately.'

'But it was not manly of Captain Cassilis,' I said, when I could frame the words.

'Hush! He is away and suffering; do not speak against him, please, while we are together.'

'And *not* suffering, my darling,' I added, with a spasm at my heart. 'No, I will remember that, and never mention his name again. We two are together, happy in our love.'

'George,' she said, slowly, 'I feel even yet that I have not told you all, and we cannot be happy entirely unless you understand what has been in my heart, and what is there still.'

But I, a very coward, would not hear her words.

'Darling, my darling,' I faltered, 'let us say no more of this: let us part in love and happiness. Nothing can pain me, now that I know you are mine still; I can never doubt you, Marion; and you are mine for always. Say to me that you are mine for always.'

'I have said it, George,' she answered, very low; 'I said it long ago.'

'Then I am happy.'

Yet, when she had left me, and I had watched her enter the lighted hall, I turned again into the chilly wood, and, in a sudden burst of grief, I hid my face upon the turf, while tearless sobs shook my frame.

I missed the train to Oxford, but I did not return home. I

wandered round Marion's home half through that dreary night, and then went back to my work, and worked more untiringly and more alone than before, still cherishing the one bright hope that I should soon win a home to which I should be allowed to take my darling.

Her letters came, as they used to come, gentle, kind, affectionate, but echoing to me a strange, ineffable wistfulness. There never was mention made of Captain Cassilis, and at last, when my college career was ended, and I had commenced work in earnest in my first curacy, I began to forget him. For the time was drawing near when I might claim my wife.

Breaking the calm and peace of the Sunday morning in my quiet Kentish village, came a mighty and terrible shock. We all knew that something horrible had happened, before we could know what it was ; and, ten minutes after I had broken off my sermon and left the church, I was working among the broken fragments of the express train which had dashed through the village, strong and perfect, only a few minutes before. Side by side, we tenderly laid the dead, in the long shed beside the line. Then—bearing weights which we felt as nothing—we carried the suffering and mangled passengers to the cottages that lay near. Ah, what a day that was ! A day which might add years to a man's life.

'This,' said one of the physicians in attendance, touching me on the arm, as he moved softly from a low bed which I had had hurriedly made up in my own study, 'is the saddest case of all, and I cannot help hoping that life will soon be over.' No one could help hoping it, seeing such suffering, I thought, while I stood gazing at the anguished face upon the pillows.

No one could tell who he was. There were no means of identifying him. No card or letter in his possession ; no mark even upon his handkerchief ; no engraving upon his ring or watch ; nothing in his pocket except the half of a return ticket between Dover and London.

Should we telegraph to Dover ?

It would be of no use, the physicians said. They must advertise, if no one came to claim him.

'It is a sad case,' was the reiterated sigh. 'The saddest case of all.'

They knew I should remain with the injured man until they sent further help ; and, when they left me, I stood beside the bed, watching with piteous anxiety the dying face. That it was a dying face, I felt as sure as the physicians had felt. A young face it was, handsome and refined, and there hung about it a quantity of soft bright hair.

'Poor fellow, poor fellow !' I whispered in my thoughts.

This agony can end but in one way ; God grant it may end soon !'



All that day I watched, wondering, with a sad and aching heart, who might be waiting for him now, who might be dreaming of him far away. And, hour after hour, he lay there, powerless to move, or speak, or see ; able only to suffer and exist. I could not leave him. The physicians, seeing I was calm and steady, and not all ignorant of their own art, gave me their directions, and left me to do the little that could be done.

In the quiet night-time, I sat beside the restless form, trusting that in the deep silence consciousness might return, and I might gain some clue as to whom we might summon, that loving faces should be near when the end came.

A burning fever followed the stupor of agony, and now the parched tongue loudly cried for water, and the hot fingers clutched me tightly, while the whispering, terrified voice moaned for help. The doctors shook their heads, as they stood with me looking down upon the anguished face, and asked me was there never anything intelligent in his rambling. Never. He raved in broken words, disconnected and meaningless, and all I could tell was that generally he was pleading, either in an eager, impassioned whisper, or in low and sad entreaty.

But at last, in the early morning, just as the grey light came creeping in to touch the little bed—scattering that darker touch of death, which had been resting there since it had looked upon it last—a change came into the rapid voice. It sank to a low murmur, and I heard words of quiet happiness, among which a few were at last faintly distinguishable.

‘Tell me again—tell me again ! Your voice is sweeter to me than the flowing of the river, or the trembling of the aspen leaves, and—I love to listen.’

Then there broke from the hot, dry lips, a low pathetic laugh, and the handsome, restless head, from which the long bright hair had all been cut, turned quickly to and fro.

‘I would have done just the same. I would have run if she had run. I would have turned aside when she did. And, had I been a hundred rivers, I would have followed her.’

I bent, breathlessly, close to the pillow, seeming to listen even with my heart as well as with my ears.

‘Can you part us ? Can you send me from you in earnest, and yet—not say you do not love me ? Ah, would the fountain be half so beautiful without—the river ? Would it—would it—Marion ?’

I stood behind the little lodge at Beechhurst, close to my own home, yet never thinking of it, for in the distance I could see Marion walk slowly down the avenue, and out into the road. And, when I overtook her, my step was easy and unconcerned, though my heart was beating passionately.

‘I have come down to see the old place once more, Marion,’ I

began, with forced indifference, partly because I feared she would be startled by my unexpected appearance, partly to hide my own emotion.

'And not to see us, George?' she asked in her gentle voice, but looking astonished at my odd manner. 'You have surely come to stay with us a little, and to rest?'

'Not one hour, Marion,' I answered, hurrying over my words, and yet trying to make them easy and natural. 'I must be back to-night in consequence of this accident.'

'How terrible it was! And you can help them, George?'

'A little. Marion, there is one—one poor—person there, who used to live—about here, and who knew you, and is always wanting you.'

'Oh, George, how sad! Who is she?'

'We do not know. No one can tell because—she had no name about her, and no friends have been to seek her. And, Marion, I am here now because, if you would come and tell us who—who she is, we might let her friends know, and she need not die without seeing one face that is dear to her. I would not have asked you this, Marion—we would have waited—but the physicians all say that, unless—she is forcibly *recalled* to life, she cannot live. Do you understand?'

'If that is so, George,' said my darling, softly, 'I will come with you now—at once.'

'Heaven bless you, dear! That is what I hoped, for no one else can—help her.'

Turning back, she left at the lodge a pencilled note to be taken to her father. Then she walked rapidly beside me, trying to talk brightly to me all the time.

Before the darkness had quite fallen, Marion followed me into my little house, gentle and still, never imagining what face she was going to see. Ah, was she bringing life and health and gladness, or was I taking her to meet despair and death?

Outside the door of the silent, lighted room I turned to her.

'Leave your hat here, Marion,' I said, with a strange quietness; and when she stood before me ready to enter, I took both her hands tightly in my own. 'Have you strength and courage, dear, to look upon a face you know and love? A face, to which, if you are—true, you may bring life and—health?'

I did not give her time to question me, nor even to question her own heart. I opened the door, and walked beside her, up to the bed where the haggard face lay upon its pillows; quite still now, but with a wandering, hungry vacancy in the hollow eyes, which was almost worse to see than their unresting fire had been.

There was no cry from the girl at my side. For one minute she fell upon her knees beside the bed; then she rose and took

the seat from which the doctor had risen at our approach, turning her face towards the one on the pillows, and watching it with all the love of her heart shining in her eyes. Ah me! such love as this I knew that I had never won! I left the room with the physician, for I felt that I had no place there, and my reward was to hear his new words of hope.

For many hours Marion sat in the same spot, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, but the unappeased want of those wide, vacant eyes; and trying, still in vain, to win their wandering gaze to her own face.

When daylight came, I was beside her again, begging her to take a little rest or refreshment.

'Not yet—not yet. Ah, there is a change!'

'There is a change coming slowly,' the physician said, with gentle kindness. 'For his sake, take a little rest.'

'Presently,' she whispered. 'Guy—Guy—my dear!'

The sunken eyes were growing a little less clouded; the restless head was turning a little less rapidly.

'Guy—Guy!' the moaning whisper still.

So the day went on. It was evening again when the wide eyes tried to fix themselves at last. First on my face, then they turned and tried to settle themselves again—upon the doctor's this time. With trembling fingers tightly clasped, Marion watched them. Still bewildered, they went back to my face, in a long, fixed, puzzled stare.

'Guy—my dear—my love!'

A questioning look crept slowly into the eyes that were fixed upon my face; an effort followed to turn them a little nearer to her; and then there was a faintly uttered broken cry—

'Marion!'

There is little more to tell. Captain Cassilis recovered, though very slowly, and my mother came to stay with me and to nurse him, for Marion's sake; while Marion herself, who stopped in the village with her father, came each day, like the very sunshine, to our quiet house. And I think that through that time, though I knew that we were parted, we were nearer to each other than we had been; for the young soldier, who in his strength and power had separated us, in his dependence and his gratitude, brought us together now.

When Captain Cassilis was able to walk without my help, only leaning on Marion's arm, I married them, in my own church, and they went abroad together, that he might escape the English winter—that winter in which my bride was to have been given to me.

They had not been married many months, when war broke out in the East. Then I saw a new work lying before me, and leaving my mother settled once more in her own cottage, I took my Master's message to the sick and dying.

Now the war is over, and Guy and Marion will soon meet. Last night, as I sat at my watch beside a dying bed, Major Cassilis came in to me to say good-bye. To-day he is on his way to Marion, and to the old sweet home which I have loved so dearly. What a happy meeting that will be, to be followed by no more partings, for Major Cassilis leaves the army now, with the honours which he has so bravely earned ! And, when he reaches home, my mother—of whom Marion takes such loving care—will know that her only son will join her soon himself, knowing that her unchanging love is Heaven's best gift to him.

## MY FIRST OFFER.

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THE grey hairs decidedly predominate now, and there is no doubt about its being a cap which hides their thinness, yet I meet my face with a far more complacent and satisfied smile, than I did in those days when I had a haunting dread of the passing of my first youth, and longed for my first offer.

Why did nobody—nobody in particular, I mean—care for me more than for other girls? I was twenty-six, and had no lover! Four years more—less than four years—and I should be thirty! yet possessing, I thought, a depth of power within me to love *some one*, and to make a dear home happy. But no one else seemed to think so, and I was twenty-six, and had no lover! For, of course, I did not call poor old Frere anything. Oh, dear, dear! the idea of marrying Frere! of being Mrs. Figgins, of Bugley Banks! I could always laugh heartily at the notion, for somehow, except when I set my mind to think upon it, I could not help forgetting I was old. I think the little tendrils of one's youth cling more tenaciously as the years go by; and so, away from the glass, I forgot my many years, and seemed sometimes young and hopeful still. But, indeed, who could help laughing at the thought of being Mrs. Figgins, of Bugley Banks? Sarah Figgins, too, I should have to sign myself; for, though my sailor-father's pet name stuck to me—and I was never anything to him but Donna—still, perhaps, I should have to give it up if I married, and be *Sarah!* Sarah Figgins! could such a name be borne? As if poor old Frere were not plain enough, and odd enough, and comical enough, without being made more so by being called Figgins! And as if his little cottage were not small enough and bare enough and dreary enough, without being called Bugley Banks!

Frere Figgins, of Bugley Banks! I always laughed when the names were mentioned in my presence, and Frere knew I did, and I knew he knew I did. He did not think, he said, that if

he were De Vere he should be one whit a better man ; he did not think, if his house were called Belmont, it would be one whit less draughty. So he laughed over it, too, though in a different spirit from mine, and it never troubled him one moment.

Poor old Frere ! how he comes before me, now that I have called up that time ! First, the particular points which I quizzed and magnified to myself—the stoop in his tall, broad shoulders, the baldness at the top of his head, the large nose, and wide, resolute mouth, the old-fashioned cut of his coats, and the thin, brown hands. Then the unnoticed points—the points that I only knew or remembered when others told me of them—the large, dreamy brown eyes, the rare and tender smile, and the perfect gentlemanliness of every word and action.

Frere had come to Littleborough as a drawing-master, but he had not many pupils even yet. He gave long lessons, too, and his terms were low.

When he first came, he sent circulars round, then he exhibited a painting of his in Cook's window, and it was criticised unmercifully by everyone, myself included ; for what did Littleborough know about pre-Raphaelitism ? Then he began with pupils from among the farmers' daughters in the neighbourhood ; then a venturesome sister of our lawyer began to take lessons, and my father asked me if I would like a term, which idea I laughed to scorn, for I could no more paint than I could ride, never having touched a brush or mounted a horse in my life. But still I do not think he had much to do, for it was whispered among us, as a great discovery, that, go to the cottage any time you would, Mr. Figgins was always disengaged, and could see you, which we wisely said would not be the case if his time were properly occupied in teaching.

One day, my father and I were walking home from the country, and a violent storm of rain came on in the darkness as we neared Littleborough. We had no cloaks and no umbrellas—I never find I have one when it rains—and we fought against it as manfully as we could, until my father remembered that we were passing the little house with the euphonious name, and that he knew Mr. Figgins sufficiently well to ask for shelter. We knocked at the door, and a neat diminutive maid opened it. She did not seem to know what to do with us when she saw us, but my father hurried me into the passage, sending a message to her master to ask if we might take shelter there for a few minutes. Mr. Figgins must have heard, for a door in the passage opened instantly, and the odd face and bent head came out to us. I saw that he coloured as he spoke to my father, but he did not look in the least awkward ; and, when he led us to the door, he said, very simply, ' I am so sorry that I have no room to take you to but this.'

We both drew back, seeing he was at supper, but he anxiously begged us to come in, and put chairs for us at the fire, with our backs to the table. And there we sat, while he and my father talked.

I know I had not much sense in those days ; but, more than that, a deliberate and unjustifiable curiosity prompted me. I turned and scrutinised the lonely bachelor's supper, wondering what such a meal would be like. A small, rather coarse, white cloth upon a tray, a vegetable dish, in which lay one potatoe boiled in its skin, one half eaten on a plate, a little butter on another plate, pepper, salt, and a glass of water—that was all. Oh ! the cheerless, comfortless look of the room, with its one mould candle and scantily curtained window ! ‘Donna,’ said my father, as we walked home after the storm, ‘I shall ask him to come to us whenever he will ; it almost made a baby of me to see that great lonely man at such a supper, and in such a room.’

From that time my father and Frere grew to be great friends, and he came to our house very often indeed, and seemed to like the change.

So, as I said, it came to be an understood thing that Frere was welcome whenever he chose to come, and he came very often indeed. And then it came to be an understood thing, too, that poor old Frere was fond of me. Not in a fatherly way at all, as I used proudly to think it ought to be ; not in a brotherly way, as I used to say it was, if the fact were ever mentioned, setting the truth at defiance ; but in a queer sort of Old-World knightly way, which nothing turned him from, nor changed. But to be Mrs. Figgins, of Bugley Banks ! The prospect could only be treated with a laugh.

‘I have the promise of another pupil, Donna,’ poor Frere would sometimes say, when he came in. ‘One of a large family, who may all want to learn in time.’

‘And I suppose you have lowered your terms for them,’ I would ask, quizzically, ‘because they asked you ?’

‘They are not very rich, and I—yes I did promise to take them for a little less than my usual terms.’

‘Which you usually don’t get, Frere.’

‘I was thinking, yesterday, Donna,’ he would perhaps say then, ‘that they may be too high for a country town.’

Then I used to laugh outright. ‘Why, old Lott, the national-school master, gets more for teaching small boys their multiplication-table. Frere, don’t be absurd. You are worth twice as much.’

‘To whom, Donna ?’

‘To your pupils, of course.’

‘I’m afraid they would not think so, but I do try to get them

Then my father would come in, and we would drop all tiresome subjects, and have a gossip round the fire, or a game of whist with a dummy ; or they would take the papers, and I would play and sing to them ; or we had a song from Frere, which generally got interrupted by a paroxysm of laughter from me, and a painfully polite remark from my father of the reassuring and encouraging kind ; for he did go so terribly out of tune, and was so pitifully unaware of the fact. I think I did him good there, for, though I could not help laughing, I did take a good deal of trouble, and taught him a few songs quite perfectly, for he had a good voice and a wonderfully feeling way of using it, and his love for music was as great as his love for his own art, I think.

'Frere,' said I one day, when he came in, 'I heard of your singing last night, and winning applause. Did you sing one of my songs?'

'Yes ; you know I always sing them now. I am afraid of going out of tune in the others since you have told me that I do it often. I wish I could help it.'

'What did you sing then?'

'"The Mistletoe Bough,"'

'And you really sang it well?'

'I tried to do so—thinking of my teacher. I felt something like the Spanish gentleman whose body was in Segovia while his soul was in Madrid.'

'How did you learn your songs before, as you have no piano?'

'I used to play the air over and over on my flute till it came to me.'

'The flute came?'

'Until the melody came to me.'

'Oh, Frere ! and you really play the flute ? Why, you must look just like Dick Swiveller in the pictures.'

'I don't remember ever playing my flute in bed,' he said, laughing ; 'nor do I know "Away with Melancholy."'

'I hope you will never wish to know it, Frere. Come and draw me a little picture.'

'Yes, in one moment ; but first I want to ask you something.'

He stood opposite me, with the old stoop rather more evident even than usual, and his hands very restless.

'Donna,' he began, in a low, grave voice, 'I have always been a very lonely man, and I know that I am odd and different from other men. I know that you often laugh at me ; but my heart is a man's heart, Donna, not different from other men's ; and all its love and all its tenderness are yours. I am so poor that perhaps I ought not to have told you this, but I have such great confidence in a man's strength to do what he may need,



that I ventured. If you say *No* to me, it will not be because I am poor, but because you feel sure you could not learn to love me. Then I will ask you to give me your hand across the grave of my buried dreams, and still to call me friend.'

It was a manly little speech, and a pleading one withal; but then he was so plain, and so shabby, and called Figgins too! He caught the little smile upon my lips, as he watched me. 'Let us shake hands, Frere, and be friends always—nothing more.'

'Friends always,' he answered, very quietly, as he took my outstretched hand. 'I ought to have known that it could be nothing more. I will try to be as true a friend as I should have been a true husband—I shall never say that word again, Donna, in reference to myself, for I know now that my life will never have a change.'

'Nonsense, Frere! I daresay you will meet your fate at the Rifle ball next month. Have you had your invitation?'

'Yes. You are going, I suppose?'

'Of course. I am anticipating it immensely.'

'Will you dance one dance with me?'

'Now, Frere, you should not ask that kind of thing. You would not like me to promise now, and then wish to draw back?'

'You would rather not be seen dancing with me, Donna?'

'N—no, not that; but I like dancing with young men.'

'Do you look upon me as a very old man?' said Frere, turning to the fire, with a queer little sigh.

'How old are you, Frere?' I asked, with the greatest impertinence.

'Thirty-six.'

I was rather surprised by his unhesitating answer, for I should not so readily have proclaimed my own twenty-six years.'

'Is that all? And yet you are so——'

'Don't hesitate, Donna; so bald, you mean to say. That is scarcely from old age. My hair came off as I recovered from a very long illness—such a dreadful illness that I never like to speak or think of it. So bad it was, Donna,' he went on, simply, 'that for seven months I lay or sat in a dark room, and heard no words but my doctor's advice and my landlady's few questions. I saw no one, no friendly hand touched me, no kind or loving word was spoken to me, all through those dark, dismal months. Donna, if I am cold and odd, there is a little excuse for me; though, God help me, that is a cowardly thing to say when He was so pitiful, and gave me back my strength.'

I turned to Frere and glanced into his face, meeting a brave and patient look which I had seen on no man's face before, and very humbly I laid my hand for a moment on his.

'Donna,' said my father, entering suddenly. 'Oh, Frere, here you are! I am glad to see you. 'Tis such a cold night. Donna, your fire shines out cheerily into the road. You are sure!—'

destined to have a bright husband, dear, if the old saying holds true.'

'What good old saying is that?' asked Frere, rising without a shade of awkward nervousness.

'That the maiden who can make and keep a bright fire will eventually find—and keep, too, I hope—a bright husband. What do you think of the truth of it?'

'A great deal,' answered Frere, quietly. 'But I would alter it, and say that the maiden who can make and keep a bright fire, will eventually make—and keep too—a bright wife.'

'Very good, Frere; I think she would. Donna, bring the chess-board, dear; we two old fogies must have a game near the fire until we are thoroughly warm. By the way, Frere, who are those Germans who have taken your old lodgings at Cook's? A funny, little, sharp-nosed man, and a tall, gaunt woman—his wife, I presume. I saw them in the shop, arranging the terms, poor creatures! So un-English they seemed, and so troubled.'

'Who are they?' I asked, all in a hurry, as usual.

'They are musicians,' said Frere, 'and intend settling here; he to teach the violin, she the piano. They are Germans, and they talk of giving a concert next week. I'm very much afraid of its success in a place like Littleborough. Somehow, the poor are not patronised as the rich and prosperous are.'

'Then I would pretend to be a rich man and a great if I were—— Who is he?' I asked.

'Herr Hendersohn.'

'If I were Herr Hendersohn, I would hold my head high, and walk as proudly as if I were a Paganini.'

'But the pride in itself alone would not do,' said Frere.

'I don't know, Frere; I have a great faith in a little pride. It does wonders; and, when one is gifted in any way, it is excusable. Don't you think so?'

'I don't want to think so,' said Frere, thoughtfully. 'Do you remember who says, "Man cannot compass aught so great as God's humility"?''

'Oh, I never remember who writes anything; but I am very sorry for the German professor.'

'Then, Donna, will you do something for them and for me? Will you come to Bugley Banks to-morrow evening and meet them? Poor things, it may take off a little of the first strangeness.'

'Yes, I will indeed, if I may.'

'Go where you will, dear,' said my father. 'It's sure to be all right. I will come, if I can get off the meeting at night.'

'Thank you both very much,' said Frere, earnestly.

So the next evening I sallied forth, in a very inquisitive frame of mind, to make acquaintance with the foreigners.

'Frere,' I whispered, drawing back at the door, full of fun, 'must I speak in German? I only know one sentence properly, and that is ordering dinner at a hotel. What shall I do?'

'Whatever comes into your head and heart, Donna, please. Miss Blair, Madame Hendersohn, Herr Hendersohn.'

The room had quite a festive look, and its two occupants had an unmistakable air of un-at-home-ness. Madame Hendersohn was a tall, thin, grey-haired lady, with a small, pinched face, and a pink cap, with a great many flowers grouped together at the top, as no English hand could have grouped them; a short, limp silk dress, with more of the brownness of age than the blackness of its originality, and a pair of spotless white kid gloves, rather short in the hands, but a great contrast to the soiled cap and old, shabby dress. She sat on Frere's one easy chair, which she immediately wanted to resign to me, and I sat down near her, when I had shaken hands with the very small, very funny-looking little man who stood by the fire, talking rapidly, with a foreign accent, and seeming to care very little whether he was attended to or not.

My thoughts were so busy that I could say scarcely anything to Frau Hendersohn. 'What a comical party we are!' I thought to myself; then, looking curiously round, my eyes met Frere's, and somehow—though I am sure he never meant it—there was a rebuke in his.

It was very early to have tea, certainly, but I fancy poor Frere thought we should grow less stiff after it. So it came in then, nearly overpowering the small, young maid, who put the tray down with a very heavy sigh. To hide the reason of my smile, I said something as funny as I could to madame, and she seemed to enjoy it, and we grew quite gay in a kind of way; though, now I come to tell of it calmly, I do assure you that never, in all the years since then, have I come across anyone so hard to entertain as poor old Frau Hendersohn was that day, in those delicate gloves, which poor Frere always blamed himself for being the means of spoiling.

Well, it was the funniest party, and I do not know which was the funniest part. Whether it was Frere's courteous handing of madame to the table, requesting her to make tea, and her forgetting for some little time to take off her gloves; or the ceaseless flow of German-English kept up by Herr Hendersohn, unmoved by any untoward event. Whether it was Frere's duet with him—flute and violin; or madame's song, pitched at the very top of a thin, weak voice, unaccompanied, of course, as there was no piano there. Whether it was the little violinist's song, true and good, but pitiful in his intense excitement; or Frere's solo on the flute, so gravely and seriously performed. Whether it was his request to be excused a song, on the plea, so

simply and pleasantly given, that Miss Blair knew he sang out of tune even with the piano, so it would be far more unbearable to hear it without; or the ludicrous effect of Frere quietly assisting the small maid to lay the table for supper, letting her do it first, then, when she was gone, moving the things to make the table look as much as possible like other people's tables. I do not know, I say, which of these, or of many others, was the funniest part. My father was obliged to send an excuse after all; so at last, when we separated, Frere sent home the maid who had come for me, and put on his great-coat.

'Will you take my arm, Donna,' he said.

'No, thank you. Oh, Frere, what a funny party we were!'

'Thank you for the "we," Donna; but I don't think you looked very funny. I think you were very kind and very pleasant.'

'No, I was not. I was laughing in my heart at them.'

'At the poor little German and his wife?' he asked, gravely.

'Yes, I was indeed. What a comical object she was!'

'He is very fond of her.'

'And she of him, I suppose?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'How can she be fond of him, I wonder?'

'We don't always understand these things,' said Frere, rather sadly; 'but he has won a good deal of love. She is his third wife, Donna.'

'Oh!'

'He has shown me the portraits of his first and second wives; both pretty and young. They both died of decline.'

'I only wonder the third didn't decline too—beforehand.'

'Hush, Donna; I don't like to hear you jest on such a subject.'

'I wonder,' said I, not feeling at all inclined for gravity, 'where *Mein Herr* got his coat. Was it of this century, think you?'

'It was a very quaint garment,' answered Frere, gently; 'but I am of Dr. Johnson's opinion, that if a man cannot get to heaven in a green coat, he can scarcely find his way thither in a grey one. What do you think?'

'I think this, Frere, that it does not cost me one halfpenny more to make my dresses pretty, than it would to make them like my great-grandmother's.'

'If the dresses had originally been your great-grandmother's, you would not find it so,' he answered, rather thoughtfully. 'By-the-by, Donna, I suppose I must have quite a superfashionable suit for this ball?'

The question was enough to tempt me to carry on the conversation solely and entirely on this ball; and in the midst of my descriptions and anticipations—all brilliant with the glow of my own imagining—we reached home.

Next morning all the bare walls in Littleborough were decorated with yellow handbills, announcing that a concert would be given 'in the Assembly Rooms on the following Tuesday, to commence at eight o'clock, the programme to contain selections from Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, etc. Violin, Herr Hendersohn; pianoforte, Madame Hendersohn. Carriages may be ordered at ten o'clock.'

'We will go, of course,' said my father, as we stopped to read the bill. 'The Littleburghers should encourage any attempt of this kind.'

So, of course, I thought he would get the tickets, and very much surprised I was on the Monday afternoon to find he had not. He thought I had better call on madame; he said it might cheer her up—he was always wanting everybody to be as cheerful as his dear old self.

So I took my purse, and paid my visit to the frau. Even there, in her own room, she appeared to me to be sitting in state, and the poor old silk was in full force while she did the honours of her position.

'I am very sorry my husband should not be able to pay his respects to you, Miss Blair,' she said. 'Pray excuse him; a pupil must be his first consideration.'

Poor old lady! It was a very natural and ready speech, and in a kind of way I admired her for it, but it did not impress me so forcibly as it would have done if I had not happened to hear the little violinist's rapid raised tones as I came up the stairs, and the inner door opened and closed again hastily, as I rapped at the outer one. I have said I had no sense in those days, and, senselessly, at that moment—unfeelingly, too, as I knew—I longed to open that chamber door, and disclose the musician who was maintaining in his secrecy such a supernatural silence.

'Have you sold nearly all your tickets, madame?' I asked.

'N—no; we have plenty left yet. Did you hear that they were all gone?'

I could not confess that I had. I had, indeed, heard a very different report, but, of course, I did not tell her so.

'I daresay most people will pay at the door,' I suggested.

'Just my husband's thoughts,' she answered, eagerly. 'He tells me that, over and over; and that, even if it is not very crowded, it will be sure to bring him many pupils.'

'It is quite sure to do that,' I said, with confidence, 'Herr Hendersohn plays so beautifully. Will you give me two reserved tickets, please, and two unreserved?'—I added that suddenly, determining that the servants should go too. 'I hope the room will not be very full,' I said, with a queer impulse, as she nervously put the tickets into a pink envelope. 'A crowded hall is so uncomfortable.' 'And then, smilingly, she led me down the stairs, and went back to release her captive husband,

The first person I saw in the concert-room when I went in, rather grandly, on my father's arm, was Frere's juvenile maid, with a bewildered expression on her small countenance, seated, very upright, at the back of the room, and beyond her an apparently interminable vista of empty benches. We took our seats without speaking, then looked into each other's faces. 'Poor things!' was all my father said, and I spread my skirts out upon the seat, to fill up as much as I could of its bleak, bare length. Then came a party of two; then a party of four; then a pause; then a party of one; then a longer pause; then a few young men sauntered in; then Miss Lewis's school—'Half-price, of course,' muttered my father, as they passed on to the front seat. Then, at last, there was such a long pause that everybody gave up the idea of anybody else coming, and began to gaze expectantly at the platform.

Frere told me afterwards that there were fifty in the room, but they looked fewer still in the long space. It did feel a little warmer when he came to us at last; and how he did applaud the excited little violinist, whose music brought the silly tears to my eyes!

'Oh, Frere, it is beautiful!' I said; 'and to have to play it to such a room!'

'To play as he plays must be happiness, however many or however few may be listening; at least, I think so, Donna.'

Then he broke off, to spend all the strength he had in applauding madame, as she was gallantly led in by her little husband. True, her style was *staccato*, and we might have dispensed with a little of the superfluous use of the pedals, but the playing was correct. So, after every piece, my father and Frere began and ended the applause, looking so pleased when their example was followed in the cold room behind. Before the concert was over, the school rose in a body, and marched out of the room, making a great noise and fuss, and bringing down my righteous wrath upon every vacant head among them.

'Donna, why do you look so sad?' asked my father, as we sat down again, after the national anthem.

'There is something so pitiful in it all.'

As we three passed out together, the little German joined us.

'Thank you, thank you!' he whispered to Frere. 'You more tickets sold than the printer his own self. Now we are ready.'

As he turned to beckon his wife, I glanced at Frere for an explanation.

'We are going to talk it over,' said he, laughing, 'even at—keep your countenance—Bugley Banks. I have to tell him, Donna, that two more pupils are waiting for him. I'm sure you are glad.'

'Very glad. Good night, Frere.' And father and I went home rather silently.

I could not prevent my thoughts being very sad, especially since I had caught the words on the illuminated handbill at the door, 'Carriages may be ordered at ten o'clock,' and noticed the empty street, undisturbed by the tread of a single horse.

Later on that night, my father said, as we dismissed the subject of the concert, 'We must ask the Germans to come here, Donna. Show them as much kindness as you can, dear.'

I determined that I would ; but the Rifle ball interfered. I was inventing a dress for the occasion, the trimming to be on an entirely new principle, and it took a long time and a good deal of earnest attention, while the important night approached. But, after all, the dress was effective, I thought, when I took a last look in my glass, as the cabman rang a lusty peal at the front door. My father looked at me with an admiring glance, which gave me a great deal of encouragement as to my future conquests, and I walked up the flower-lined staircase with a very lofty head. We paid our respects to the colonel of the corps, and strolled across the room. We stopped with the first group whom we knew, the Bourkes, and began to talk of the gay, bright scene. A dance was ending just then, and as Harry Bourke joined his sisters he engaged me for the next. Did not I enjoy that first dance, in all the novelty and excitement, and in the anticipation of a delightful evening ? When Harry left me with his sisters, my father again strolled up.

'I think I may leave you here, Donna,' he said. 'I daresay you will not sit much, and I can have a rubber, and join you presently. You will see Frere soon, I expect.'

During the next quadrille I was so busy looking about me that I did not mind nobody having asked me to dance. The band alone was almost pleasure enough, I thought. Then a young rifleman, whom I knew, engaged me for a dance, and away we went, whirling to the merry tune. To say the room was fairyland to me would be but feebly to describe my opinion of everything. But after that no one seemed very eager for a dance with me. There I stood, or sat, looking round still, but with a dimness coming gradually over my happy excitement. The couples glided past me, and there I sat, with the eldest Miss Bourke (who was very *passée* indeed) an intense longing in my heart for Frere, or that some one—anyone—would come and break the long spell of this sitting. Everybody must notice, I thought, how I was neglected, and either pity or laugh at me. How was it ? There were many there whom I knew very well, yet they never seemed to come near me. Now and then a stranger would cross the room towards us with a scrutinising pair of eyes, while my heart leaped at the thought that my turn was coming at last. But he would pass on, and my heart would go down again into my so-little-trodden white boots. True, there were a great many more ladies present than gentlemen, but then

I noticed that some girls danced constantly, and surely thin might have been more equally shared.

'I like looking on,' observed Miss Bourke, cheerfully. Look at that pretty girl in pink.'

As if I should ! As if I cared for any pretty girl in pink ! But I was obliged to answer her with a ghastly attempt at a smile. I could feel how changed my face was growing ; how the expectancy and happiness were going out of it ; and, from trying not to look as if I were watching for a partner, my eyes assumed quite a glazed appearance. Then my nose—I felt my anxiety and disappointment settling there in a crimson spot. Oh ! if it all ended by my nose growing red, then might I wish the slippery boards to open, and swallow me with as much dispatch as possible.

A movement was being made at last. Supper ! At the end of the room I caught sight of my father, making his way towards me. I felt I should almost hate my own father if he had began to ask me questions about the dances I had had ; yet how pleasant it was to see him ! I was moving towards him with the crowd, when an old friend of his overtook me.

'Donna, going in to supper alone ! That will never do. Take my arm.'

Was I most mortified or most grateful ? He was an old married man, who had known me all my life ; so I put my hand in his ; and, when my father saw me do so, he took in some one else, and I never saw him again for hours.

I did not enjoy my supper ; somehow the romance was dying out of everything, and it was a positive effort to answer lightly the few remarks that were made to me.

As my sturdy old friend led me back into the ball-room, the band was striking up again.

'Engaged, of course, for this dance,' he asserted, with a most provoking assurance.

'N—no !' I stammered, looking once more yearningly round for Frere.

'Then let us take our places.'

He knew I should be only too glad, so he asked it without a shade of deference. But my spirits rose with the dance. I forgot the possible tint of my nose, and when, after that, a very handsome young officer asked the honour, I conceded it gladly and graciously. I danced three dances then—the final flicker of my lamp. After those three I sat once more—sat and sat ; and then my only feeling, as the time rolled on—no, crept on—was that of great thankfulness that Frere was not there to see my humiliation. And oh ! I did so wish to be at home, doing anything—even the thing I most disliked of all—only to be away from these hundreds of people who did not care for me.

The band went on at its maddening pace, and the wearying



couples passed me. At last my father came up for the last time, and asked me if I were willing to leave.

I felt inclined to rush into his arms and kiss him for the suggestion, but I remembered that it would be unwise to publish my defeat, and so I said, indifferently, that I was quite ready, and took his arm, and turned my back upon the brilliant room—thankfully!

‘How strange it is that Frere never came,’ father said, as we got out of the hubbub.

‘Yes,’ I answered, feebly, feeling glad of it, however strange it might be.

‘He ought to have been there. Scores of ladies have sat all the evening, they were so gloriously in the majority. Have you enjoyed it greatly, dear?’

‘It was a very brilliant ball, I think.’

‘Yes; but you look sadly tired. Make haste to bed, and don’t get up to-morrow till sunset, if you can sleep. Good night, dear.’

So ended my long-anticipated ball; and such a wakeful night, or rather morning, followed it, that, partly from that cause, and partly from an indefinable feeling of shame, I did not make my appearance downstairs until dinner-time. Then I began to wonder again why Frere had not been at the ball last night, and to consult about it with my father.

I felt so dull and good-for-nothing that I was obliged to take myself to task. ‘Now, Donna,’ I said, ‘this is simply absurd. Do you think any sensible girl would waste the whole day *after* a ridiculous ball, as well as the whole day *before* it? Besides,’ I added, by way of postscript, ‘if you look so dismal, that stupid Frere will be sure to guess that you were not admired; so, if you have any sense left, you will rouse yourself, and represent it to him as brilliantly as possible.’ So, as I *had* some sense left, in my own opinion, I assumed a gay expression of countenance, the minute he came in with my father to supper. He had a sad look on his face, which I was rather pleased to see under the circumstances.

‘Oh, Frere, why weren’t you at the ball?’ I asked, all in a hurry.

‘There were many reasons against it when the time came,’ he answered, quietly.

‘How silly you were! It was one of the best balls I ever saw.’

‘Only *one* of the best! I expected you to tell me it was the very best, beyond compare.’

‘And so it was,’ I went on, eagerly. ‘Now I come to think of it, it was the very best. I like balls, Frere.’

‘Of course you do,’ he answered, kindly. ‘Tell me about it.’ Then I began to expatiate, and a glowing account I gave him.

If Frere were not firmly convinced in his own mind that I had been courted, flattered, and admired as much as, if not more than, anybody there, and danced the whole night through, I fear it was not owing to any deficiency in my highly-coloured account.

'Then you had a very happy as well as exciting evening, Donna?' Frere asked, as I finished, almost breathless, and he looked at me with his big brown eyes.

'Well, I don't mean to say one's happiness entirely depends on a ball, more or less,' I replied, feeling almost uncomfortable; 'but it is a good thing to go to a ball once in a way, Frere.'

'And yet you noticed that I was not there?'

'Yes, I did wonder why you did not come, but I guessed that any trifle would turn you from your resolution. And then I knew,' I added, mischievously, 'that you did not care for dancing with me.'

'You know a good many things, Donna,' said Frere, with a quiet little smile in his gentle eyes, 'so we can excuse one little mistake among them.'

'What were you doing while we were dancing away, Frere?' I asked, presently. 'Blowing your melancholy into your flute, like poor Moddle?'

'Very probably,' he answered, pleasantly; 'but I cannot tell until I know exactly what time you were dancing away.'

I thought, in my troubled conscience, that that speech implied an insinuation that I had not been dancing all night, and I resented it accordingly.

'I daresay you had an amateur concert at Bugley Banks, and that Madame Hendersohn sang "Life let us cherish" like a lark—I mean, up in the skies.'

'She is too ill to sing, I'm sorry to say,' said Frere, gravely.

'Ill! How is that?'

'I don't know how it is. I told you she was ill last week, only I don't think you heeded, because the ball was in your head.'

Frere did not say, 'filling your head,' though he might have done so with truth; and for a moment I felt ashamed of myself, as I answered,

'I'm very sorry, really. I shall go and see her to-morrow. Now, Frere, come and sing.'

What was the matter with him? Each time he tried to begin, the notes refused to come. I never witnessed such an utter failure.

'Frere, what is it?' I asked, in astonishment, turning on the music-stool to look into his face.

'I don't know,' he answered, with a nervous trembling of his lips. 'I am hoarse, I suppose.'

'Has anything hurt you to-day?' I inquired, still looking up into his face,

'Do you think anything hurtful ever finds its way to Bugley Banks?' he asked, with an effort at a smile.

'I sometimes find my way there. Now just try once more.'

'Please don't ask me. The notes will not come. Will you sing one song to me instead?'

'Oh, no, that is not at all fair.'

'What is the matter with you, Frere?' asked my father, looking up from his paper.

'Nothing, thank you, only my voice shakes a little.'

'And he wants me to do all the performing, while he placidly holds on the noiseless tenor of his way.'

'Silly child.'

'Really, Frere, I am not going to sing, while you sit idle and make comparisons, which are odious, between me and Frau Hendersohn, to my discomfiture.'

'You will not sing, then?' he asked, quietly.

'No, thank you.'

When I bade him good night, noticing how pale and nervous he looked as he stood opposite to me in the full light, a strange feeling came over me suddenly; partly an intense longing to comfort him, partly a wild wish that I had never seen him, and partly a kind of dread that he was going from me, and I could not say a word to him. One thing I determined upon that night; I would go and see madame the next morning, whatever should betide. I would do that one little thing which was not all frivolous. With that resolution, I bade my father good night.

'Why, Donna,' he said, raising my face tenderly, 'you look as melancholy as poor Frere. Have you, too, had a picture rejected, on which your hopes were fixed?'

'Has he?' I asked, falteringly.

'Yes, this morning, poor fellow!'

It was rather early for an orthodox call when I arrived at Madame Hendersohn's door. This time there was an unmistakable pupil grinding away, and I hesitated, but the little Herr came out to me very eagerly.

'Madame?' he repeated. 'Ah! yes, she will be delighted to see you; so goot of you. My poor beloved!'

He ushered me into the bed-room, where, in her frilled wrapper, she sat at a pleasant little fire. I so well remember the look of her, poor old lady, while I settled myself opposite her, wondering unconsciously why she kept the grey curls in paper; whether she reversed the order of things, and took them out at night.

'I am so sorry to hear you have been ill, madame,' I began.

'You are very kind,' she answered, rather feebly.

'Indeed, no, I have been far otherwise, for I heard you were ill more than a week ago, but my head was so full of the ball that I forgot all about it.'

'And very naturally, too,' she said, kindly. 'I was very ill indeed at that time; I hardly know what caused it——'

She paused suddenly, and looked at me in a wistful sort of way.

I guessed why she paused, so I ignored her unfinished sentence, and asked, 'Have you anyone to take good care of you, madame?'

'Oh! yes, my husband does everything; he is so good to me, so tender.'

'But then his pupils take him away. Has he a great many now?' I asked, inquisitively.

'Yes, for a beginning. Mr. Figgins has never tired of working in his behalf.'

'Did Frere—did Mr. Figgins get some of them for him?'

'Yes, mademoiselle, all of them, I think. You see it is awkward for a perfect stranger—who is a foreigner, too—to go about among you proud English and ask for employment.'

'Of course it is,' said I, hotly. 'A musician, too! Why, they ought to hasten to him, and be only too glad to——'

'But they do not think so,' put in madame, gently, as I stopped; 'they will think more of Wilhelm, though, when they know him better. He is so very clever.'

'Indeed they will,' I assented, warmly; 'and I know a boy who wants to learn the violin; he can ride in once a week for a lesson, and dine with us. Why did I never think of this before?'

'Thank you for thinking of it now,' she said; 'and thank you, most of all, for coming to see me. I have seen no gentle female face since I fell ill. Will you excuse my not being dressed? Wilhelm does not mind it,' she added, shyly, as I laughed; 'but, indeed, I have not many dresses with me here. In fact,' she went on, as if she could not help calling forth a little sympathy, 'I have not many anywhere just yet. Wilhelm said when we were settled here I must have everything. He is so fond of seeing me look well, and he does not mind how hard he works for me.'

Only with great difficulty could I keep back something that came into my eyes, as I remembered the old silk and the white gloves.

'We have not prospered very greatly as yet,' continued the old lady, looking rather thoughtfully into the fire; 'but I think it is coming gradually. Wilhelm says it comes in rapid steps. But at first'—and her voice fell into a low, tremulous tone—'it was so hard, and the town was so cold, that I grew fretful, and made Wilhelm sad—poor Wilhelm! But, since the concert, things have changed, as he said they would, and I think this illness of mine is the last spot of the darkness.'

'The concert was very pleasant,' said I, with rather a spasmodic gulp. 'A concert-room is scarcely ever fuller than that in Little-borough; but, unmusical as we are, we had taste enough to appreciate that treat Herr Hendersohn gave us.'

'I think they liked it,' madame said, brightening all over her face, 'though there were not very many there. So many people bought tickets and did not go.'

'How was that?' I asked, astonished, as well I might be, knowing the economy of Littleborough.

'I don't know why it was, mademoiselle. It was a strange choice as Wilhelm played; but Mr. Figgins sold fifty tickets to people who were not able to go. Of course, in one respect, their absence did not signify; but it was a pity.'

Fifty people in Littleborough bought tickets on the understanding that they would not be used! How could I credit it? A light broke gradually upon me as I tried to make it clear to myself, and then the tears did come indeed. Ah! what wonder Frere could not afford to go to that ball?

'Another good thing came to us too,' said madame, quietly, pleased at the interest and sympathy she saw in my face. 'God always makes it light when we come to a very dark part. In the very darkest part of my illness, when the heaviest thought I had was how a doctor's bill would fret poor Wilhelm, now that we could not pay it, there came a letter sent by God—you call it a godsend—a bank-note for ten pounds from some one, it said inside, who had had pleasure to the value of that in hearing Herr Hendersohn. Dear mademoiselle, I keep that writing near me always.'

'Will you show it to me?' I asked, very humbly.

'It is a lady's writing. God bless her for it!' she said, as she handed the paper to me quite tenderly.

A lady! Certainly it was like a lady's hand, but I saw through the disguise. I knew and recognised every letter, unlike as they were to Frere's usual odd, bold handwriting. I gave it back to her just as tenderly.

'Do you know it?' she asked, eagerly.

'I do not know any lady in Littleborough who writes like that,' I answered; and then I felt so disinclined to talk more, and so eager to carry out a scheme which had entered my head, that I left her.

When my father came home, we had a long discussion, which ended so satisfactorily that, before the early twilight had set in next day, Madame Hendersohn was installed in a large easy-chair in our cheerful drawing-room; the best bedroom was prepared for her, and various nourishing condiments ready for her especial benefit.

'Herr Figgins will be so astonished,' said the bewildered old lady, as she lay back, with a deep-drawn sign of content.

'So he will,' said my father, 'when he comes home. Just now he is in London, looking after the rejected picture, which may be getting damaged, he thinks.'

When I heard he was gone, when I felt that he could not

come in as of old ; there came down upon me the weight that had hung above me when he bade me good-bye, looking so pale and ill. What would I not have given then to have had him back, if only to sing when he asked me, and to tell him I was sorry he could not do so ? I had been so careless, so cold and hard, while he was sad and suffering.

Madame Hendersohn recovered her strength very slowly, but she grew talkative and cheerful, and told me many a funny story, in the long hours we sat together. Her husband spent every evening with us, generally bringing his violin. Sometimes I accompanied him ; and the quick, sharp corrections he gave me did me a great deal of good. Sometimes madame accompanied him, and I would sit idle, while my sad thoughts wandered to Frere, and I wondered when he was coming home with his slighted picture.

One afternoon, after I had made madame comfortable on her bed, to rest until tea-time, and while I stood at the drawing-room fire, trying to make up my small mind to go out, the front bell rang.

‘There is a visitor,’ I said, impatiently ; ‘now I cannot go.’

It was not at all the kind of visitor I expected, and I started at sight of Frere’s brave, patient face. I made him sit down on my own low chair, and I stood opposite him, gazing into his face.

‘Frere, where is your picture ?’

‘I sold it, Donna. I met with a picture-dealer who bought it.’

‘At half the original price, I suppose ?’

‘For four pounds,’ he answered, quietly.

‘And what did you mark it when you first sent it up ?’

‘Ten guineas.’

The answers were so quiet to my eager questioning !

‘Then why did you sell it for four pounds ?’

‘Because I—wanted the ready-money.’

I slipped down until I was kneeling on the rug, then I folded my arms upon his knees, looked up into his face, and spoke very earnestly.

‘Frere, when I went to that ball, nobody cared for me, nobody took any notice of me, nobody wished to dance with me, and I hated it. I hated it more than words can tell ; and I came home and represented it all falsely to you, trying to vex you ; trying to make you jealous because you were not there. It was all untrue ! I have such a small, small mind, and I was such a hypocrite that night ! You never thought what a sly hypocrite I was. I know now why you could not go.’

‘Those people must have had no taste,’ said Frere, absently, because I paused.

‘And after that,’ I went on, my voice lowered, I heard of

noble things done by a good man—a man so good that he never knew when he did noble things—and I love him, oh, I love him so !’

Frere’s face grew pale as death, and he bent it a little lower towards me as I went on.

‘He could not go to this ball, Frere, because he loved others better than himself ; and now I want him to know how others love him—how I love him better than all the world—all the world. Oh ! Frere, will you forgive me ?’

He did not mention forgiveness, but his glad words haunt me, sometimes even now, though we have been married for so many, many years.

## THE HEIR OF ROSSCAIRNE.

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ALTHOUGH I only professed to come to Rosscairne on a month's visit, and although I felt quite sure my two maids were getting lazy and self-indulgent with nothing to do at my own cottage, there I stayed week after week. It was a pleasant place to stay at, though there was no lady at its head (except when I was there), and I think there ought to be one in every household, from the viceregal lodge to the very lowest cabin in the country. But, besides that, there is something else odd about Rosscairne, for the gentleman at its head is neither its possessor nor its heir. Poor Tev ! I always feel vexed about it, because I love the lad so well. But he never is vexed—not he ! Of course he is now looked up to as the master, and I think the people would like him to be so always ; but Tev cannot bear to hear it mentioned. He says he is regent for Willie—his eldest brother's orphan child—who comes into the property on attaining his majority, and turns Tev out. 'Trevor Bradford, Esquire, of Rosscairne,' just now, 'justice of the peace, deputy-lieutenant, and sheriff for the County of Fermanagh ;' but then to be only a kind of farmer, I suppose, with a small income ; and to settle down on that old farm which is his only share of the wide estate of Rosscairne.

Well, it aggravates me to think of it, for somehow Tev has won himself a place in my heart which the child can never reach.

I was sitting on the south terrace, looking over the wide, wild, sunny scene of lake and mountain. The sparkling shimmer of the sunlight played on the calm waters of the Lough, of which Tev is so much afraid, because of little Willie's wandering, dreamy habits. I had sat alone longer than usual, for we had visitors at Rosscairne, and their pursuits were too energetic and too restless for me ; besides which, I did not often find a solitude which either Tev or Willie did not break in upon. I supposed they were with the Elliots for Mrs. Elliot required a good deal of



Tev's attention, and the girls naturally expected it. I fancied that they did not consider him quite so devoted as they had been accustomed to find gentlemen who entertained young lady guests at their bachelor homes, but I thought I had never seen him so anxious to make guests linger. I wished I could be more glad to see it, for Reby Elliot was really a very pretty, gentle, refined girl; and I longed to see him win a wife he loved, and bring her to the beautiful house above Lough Erne. The house, I always felt, would have been perfect if it had had the brightening, softening influence of a lady's management and presence.

Thinking this, I tried to be glad when I saw Tev linger with Reby on the lake shore, or row her—at her gentle, timid request—upon its waters, or ride beside her down the old shadowy avenue. Yet there was always something to prevent my feeling really glad; and when Nora drove her mother and me after them, or lured me out upon the lake in a boat she rowed entirely herself, I felt that I could not answer the bright, quizzical smile with which she watched them, or respond to the piquant little asides she uttered for my amusement. I could not help feeling that Tev really meant it at last, and that the reason he and Reby were so constantly together, was that he wooed her in all earnestness. Yet when I spoke—as I had spoken, with my old-maidish persistency, for the last seven years—of how he needed this same brightening, softening influence of a lady's management and presence in his house, he only laughed, and said *I* brought all that was needed. I, with my old-fashioned tastes and superannuated ideas! I told him only a wife could brighten and embellish his house, and then he said, with his old obstinacy, that it was not his house, and that it was too soon to look out for a wife for Willie. So aggravating he could be when he liked.

But that same aggravation used to amuse me greatly when it was directed towards Mrs. Elliot. Most delicate were her hints that it would be well for Tev to secure a beautiful and well-bred wife; and most cool were his requests for further advice on the subject. If I had been twenty years younger, I could not have better enjoyed his delicious misconception of her drift; and to this day, though I have studied the matter deeply, I cannot tell whether it was fun or earnestness.

I was pondering this very subject when he came to me on the south terrace. Like me, he was dressed for dinner, so could afford to linger there until the second bell should summon us; and, as usual, Willie and the greyhound were at his heels. How fond the child was of escaping from Charity, his nurse, and following his uncle Tev, the loving, kind young guardian, whose whole life seemed to me to be devoted to the boy.

'Oh! auntie,' cried Willie, leaning with his elbows on my knees, and looking up into my face, 'me and Tev' (the child, not remarkable for the perfection of his grammar, never spoke of

Tev save as an elder brother, and I am sure never thought of him otherwise) 'have been telling stories under the cedar, and he said all the fairies were like Reby.'

'I have not a doubt of it,' I put in, drily. 'Where are the girls now, Tev?'

'Resting, I presume, Aunt Bona, or dressing, or both, he answered. 'Take care, Willie. Where are you going?'

'Only down the garden, Tev; mayn't I?'

'No, not alone, dear. Oh! Aunt Bona,' Tev added, impatiently, as the child stopped on his way down the terrace steps, 'I do believe I shall have to build a high wall all round Lough Erne, that I may have a little peace of mind.'

'You are needlessly anxious about the child, I think, Tev.'

'But I cannot help it. The remembrance of a child's death which I witnessed here, will haunt me until Willie is old enough to guard himself. I cannot help being always anxious about him.'

'I'm sure there is no occasion for it, dear, while he has such a maid as Charity; she does not voluntarily let him leave her sight.'

'No; I have great confidence in Charity,' replied Tev, with a fatherly anxiety which I often noticed in him.

'Did you and Reby and Mrs. Elliot enjoy your row?' I ask, presently.

'Very much. Reby said she enjoyed most her mother's enjoyment—she always thinks of others' pleasures before her own.'

'Oh, indeed!' said I; but the two words did not express half what I meant, and Tev only smiled as he went on.

'I took them round and showed them the little bay, just beyond the park, which always makes me so careful in not letting Willie go beyond the boundary. The very look of the place made Reby shudder. Where did you and Nora go, aunt?'

'I didn't care for a walk, and fancied Nora would go with you; but, instead of that, she took a long, rambling excursion by herself. She has been miles away, over the bogs, and has discovered some miserable little cabin, in the very middle of one of them, where a woman is lying ill on some straw. She had to creep into it on her hands and knees, she says; and while she went through what she called the entrance hole, the place was in utter darkness. Nora seems to think you are to blame for having such a wretched dwelling on your land, Tev; but I tell her those people acknowledge no landlord.'

'Never mind telling her anything about it, Aunt Bona,' interrupted Tev, carelessly; 'she would blame me just the same; and, if it pleases her, I'm sure it doesn't hurt me.'

I like Nora very much, Tev.'

That was just all I said, and yet he turned away as bored as

if I had inflicted on him an hour's harangue about the girl in whom he could not, or would not, take any interest.

'You like her sister better?' I ventured, presently, looking at him a little more keenly than I would have had him believe.

'Indeed, I do. Isn't she pretty? and isn't she gentle and soothing? I like a girl who never ruffles one, and never excites one to anger or anxiety; don't you, Aunt Bona?'

'No.'

'Tev tossed back his hair with a laugh.

'We don't agree in this as we do in most things, auntie; but I think you must own that Reby is tenderly and consistently kind to Willie.'

'Yes, she is,' I answered, drily; 'so is Nora.'

'Nora!' echoed Tev, folding his arms as he lounged on the stone balustrade before me, and looked at me with quizzical eyes. 'Why only this morning Nora brought him in covered with mud. She had been teaching him to jump in the little bog, and, of course, he had fallen *into* the water, instead of jumping over it. I never heard of such a heedless, random trick for a young lady; did you?'

'Never,' I returned, gravely; 'but I fancy she will not do it again, for she has had a terrible scolding. In one of her own leaps she let her Galway cloak fall into one of the bog pools, too, and spoiled it for ever. She says she left it drying on the turf a dark chocolate colour.'

'She is most random,' said Tev, curtly, 'and rebellious, too—even against her mother.'

I wonder who, having any spirit, would not rebel against Mrs. Elliot?' I said, knowing that I was not inculcating a good principle, but not caring much, because, you see, I had no children of my own.

'Charity says that Nora makes Willie quite unmanageable,' said Tev; 'you heard her say it.'

'*Charity!*' I echoed, with unmistakable contempt in my voice. 'The child need not be blamed for rebelling a little at Charity's management. Dear me! if she had her own way, he would never leave these straight gravel walks. He is not unmanageable by you, Tev, or by me, or by Nora herself, which is the best sign of all. I like Nora,' I added, conclusively.

'I like Reby, Aunt Bona,' said Tev, as conclusively.

We had sat for a few minutes in silence together there, when Reby Elliot sauntered out to us. Very pretty she looked, certainly, in her dinner-dress, and I was very sorry to see it.

The sunshine fell full upon her fair face and bright light hair, as she stood opposite Tev, leaning with picturesque ease against the stone rails, and I noticed that his eyes were riveted upon her most admiringly. She was telling me of the pleasant afternoon she had spent on the Lough, speaking in the gentle, soothing way

which Tev felt so attractive, when suddenly we heard a rush behind us, and Nora darted round the corner of the house, with Willie after her at full speed. Laughing and out of breath, Nora ran round to put me and my seat between her and her little pursuer, and then—laughing so irresistibly that I, for one, joined in like any child—she dodged him round and round me, until he grew obstreperous in his glad excitement. Then she surrendered, and, allowing herself to be caught by Willie's eager little hands, dropped the long white dress which she had held round her as she ran, and sat down at my feet upon the terrace steps. Willie, unwilling to release his captive, held her round the neck from behind, and pressed unmercifully her lately-dressed hair. Tev drew back with eyebrows raised. Whether Nora saw it or not, I do not know; she only turned and whispered mysteriously to Willie that Charity had come, and 'he must not keep her out, or she would get a chill, because there was so little warmth about her.'

'Mr. Willie, it seems no use to dress you now,' began Charity, in a voice of most respectful emphasis. 'You have been into the yards again, sir. Please to come to your tea.'

I could see that Nora was quietly holding him back by his tunic; but she looked perfectly unconscious of either his presence or Charity's. I could not help laughing a little, though I felt sorry that the girl should always do these rebellious things before Tev.

'Come sir, please,' said Charity again, more emphatically.

But still Nora held him, while Tev's eyes darkened rather angrily.

'Willie dear,' murmured Reby, bending and kissing his hot little forehead, 'you will not keep Charity waiting longer, will you?'

Still Nora held him, and still looked away over the lake, as if she did not know that he was there. And Tev's lips were tight, and I—I could not venture to speak, for fear of laughing.

Softly bending lower still, Reby took the child's hand and drew him away, leading him with a smile to his nurse. And Nora, having let him go, heaved a great sigh, as if she had been defeated in a high moral purpose.

'I wonder you detained Willie when his nurse wished for him, Nora dear,' observed Reby, gently.

'Do you?' rejoined Nora, with comic astonishment.

'Yes; you ought not to do so.'

'That specimen of Charity is a perfect Frankenstein to me. Have you read "Frankenstein," Aunt Bona?'

She tossed back her dishevelled head carelessly to address me, and, when I told her that I knew that very uncomfortable story, she laughed heartily.

'Then don't you think that nurse is just such a hauntin' g cubus as Frankenstein?'

'Hush, Nora, dear,' interposed Reby, quietly; 'this is hardly fair to Charity. I like her, because she is so unremittingly watchful over dear little Willie.'

'Unremittingly watchful—as a basilisk,' rejoined Nora, impatiently, as she rose.

Tev rose too, a little unwonted pride in the gesture.

'The grounds about here so dangerously border the lake,' said he, 'that it is necessary for some one to be unremitting in keeping watch over the child.'

'Couldn't he have a bodyguard only,' laughed Nora, petulantly, 'without a perpetual sentinel in his path?'

'If I think Charity's vigilance necessary, and Aunt Bona does, too,' added Tev, toning down his hot reply by the reference to me, 'I hope you will not blame me for not heeding your prejudice, Nora.'

'I do,' she answered, a flash in her eyes which seemed to me half real pain; 'but, then, I have done so for such a long time that the sensation, however distressing to you, cannot be new.'

'Will you go in and smooth your hair a little, Nora dear?' asked Reby, thoughtfully, as we turned to the house. 'You will just have time before the bell rings.'

'I should not,' replied Nora, deliberately; 'for that automaton of a butler would ring exactly when I had taken my hair all down. I believe he has made an arrangement with himself to circumvent me at every opportunity, by summoning me to meals whenever I am not ready.'

'Our servants all seem to be unfortunate enough to dissatisfy you,' remarked Tev, without glancing across at her, as he sauntered on at Reby's side.

'Oh! surely, Nora dear,' began Reby, in her soft, deprecating voice, 'you would not, in Tev's place, dismiss the faithful, valued old servants?'

'They are not faithful to me; they are of no value to me,' answered the girl, with a quick impatience which was not all carelessness; so I would dismiss everyone, and have nothing but colossal young footmen in canary, and beautiful young maids in blue, that would make the servants' hall a cheerful picture-gallery. And I would take all the visitors in to see that, just as the fossil housekeeper here takes visitors into that sarcophagus she calls the picture-gallery.'

'Oh, Nora, Nora,' pleaded Reby, 'you are so heedless of what you say. Aunt Bona, please to stop her.'

Nora bent her face to mine, her eyes brimming over with laughter. I kissed the ironical lips involuntarily; but strange to say though I so often regretted her random, artificial words, I never cared to stop her. Dearly as I longed for Tev to love her, I knew

that if he did so, he must love her as she was, for I could see that she would not, through that whole visit, show herself to him save in this careless mood.

'There's the bell!' exclaimed Nora, as we reached the hall. 'I am so glad that I have no time for further adornment.'

'You will vex poor mamma, I fear,' her sister whispered, not quite aloud.

'Not I, so long as her faultless elder daughter sits opposite her; besides, I'm bound to vex her now and then, or she would forget my very existence.'

There was in the light voice a strange tone of regret, which made me look searchingly into her face to see how much of this she meant; but the dark, restless eyes, which were so hard to understand, had wandered to Tev's face, and were watching, simply in amusement, the glance of admiration with which he followed her sister's elegant, gliding figure. I felt put out for the whole evening. It was a very ungrateful feeling, I know, because I had no pain to bear; but some little things will put me out, however much I try not to let them.

The girls and I were playing croquet. I (who know nothing at all of the game, and never should play it if I did) was but an unwilling partner to Nora, who had determined that she and I should beat Reby, playing with two balls. I was just thinking in what a different manner she played from her usual quiet skillfulness, when Tev came up to us. We all turned to wait for him, even Nora.

'Where is Willie?' he asked.

His sudden question startled us all a little, though the next moment we felt inclined to laugh at it.

'Sure to be with Charity,' returned Nora, carelessly. 'He is scarcely ever away from her.'

'I have not seen him since lunch,' I said.

'We left them playing in the garden when we went to drive,' added Reby, with a gentle anxiety in her lace. 'Why are you alarmed?'

'Because I met Charity at the park gates looking for him,' said Tev, evidently pleased at the sympathy she showed; 'and it has made me foolishly nervous, I suppose. I will go and seek him.'

'So will I,' returned Reby, readily; 'I, too, shall not be happy until he is found. He was quite safe when we went, so I hope you will not make yourself anxious.'

'Tev doesn't deserve to live on a magnificent lough,' said Nora, throwing away her ball; 'it is a perpetual nightmare to him.'

'It is very shallow here, is it not?' inquired Reby, her face full of real concern.

'Yes, just below the gardens,' answered Tev, quietly; 'but there are spots in the ground, below which it flows deep and

treacherous—I showed you one of them, you remember—and the remembrance of these places is, as Nora somewhat strongly expresses it, a perpetual nightmare to me.

‘No wonder,’ said Reby, with a little shudder. ‘Let us all go and seek Willie.’

She and Tev walked away together, while Nora stood against the great cedar, idly watching them. But when she had seen them turn out of sight, she started up, her dark eyes all aflame.

‘Aunt Bona, where is the boy?’ she cried. ‘Oh, where is he?’

‘My dear,’ I said, a little amused, and a good deal astonished, ‘you are as bad as Tev. I believe Charity has found him before now. He often tries to elude her, but never succeeds for many minutes together, unless, of course, he is with Tev or with us.’

‘I don’t think Charity has found him,’ replied Nora, in a low, pained voice. And then, without another word, she sped along the park, and disappeared among the trees. I felt nervous and uncomfortable myself, though I could not understand any reason for the feeling; and I, too, strolled restlessly towards the lake.

Half an hour after we had left the croquet-ground, the bell summoned us to dinner, and, more for the sake of questioning each other than anything else, I think, we gathered in the hall. Tev, still in his morning dress, hurried in from the outbuildings, his face dark and troubled. Mrs. Elliot came downstairs, asking a hundred different questions at once. Reby entered, flushed and tired, and stood at the window, crying quietly. Nora never appeared at all.

One or two of us made a pretence of eating, but Tev could not; and with a voice that shook, despite his effort to check it, he begged us to excuse him, and at once went out again. Reby, throwing a light cloak over her shoulders, strolled out upon the terrace, and walked restlessly to and fro. I did not feel it at all incumbent on me to stay and entertain Mrs. Elliot, so I, too, wandered again about the park until dusk. All the servants were out then, and, whichever way I turned, I met some eager searcher. At last, standing a moment to look down upon one of the boat-houses, I saw Nora come out of it alone, and herself wheel down to the water the little boat which she delighted to row. I watched her take her seat in it, and push it from shore, slowly, smoothly, and steadily; and then I suddenly felt that some one else was watching her, too.

‘Tev, why did we never think of the boats before?’ I said.

‘One has been out an hour,’ replied Tev, still watching Nora, with drawn brows, ‘but I have had it in the other direction. Why should she row in that direction, unless she herself has taught Willie to take the very way he is forbidden to go.’ And then he broke off in his bitter speech, and senselessly began to blame Nora for going alone.

'I cannot stay in the house any longer, sir,' said the old butler, who met us as we turned again towards the house.

'Has no one returned with tidings?' questioned Tev, sharply, in his fear.

'No, sir; though all have been back to the house since you left, except Corrigan. He has not been seen since he first started. Miss Nora came in once, but it was only to see if any of your fishing-rods were missing.'

'And were they all there?' asked Tev, his firm lips drawn and white.

'One is away, sir. We cannot find the little one you lend Mr. Willie, when you take him to fish; and,' added the old man, his own voice shaking, as he met his master's eager eyes, 'it was there this morning.'

'Come down to the boat-house, Tev,' I said, as calmly as I could in my new fear.

Just as we reached the lake shore, advancing slowly on the waters, we saw the little boat which we had watched some time before; but Nora was not rowing now; she sat in the stern, holding in her arms a little figure, wrapped in a boat-rug. Corrigan was rowing. I shall never forget the agony I read on Tev's face, as the boat came leisurely in. I shall never forget how hard it was to keep him still beside me on the pebbly shore. Nor shall I ever forget the shadow of disappointment which fell over Nora's face when she saw him.

The boat drew up, and Tev had his arms outstretched, though he did not even seem to see Nora. Very tenderly and gently she laid her burden in them, and then Tev, bending his troubled face upon the child's cold and motionless one, carried him in.

'Go quickly, Aunt Bona, you will be needed,' cried Nora, clasping her hot, tired hands; 'I think his life is given back. Oh, how merciful God is to the little ones!'

I left the girl standing there, tired and wet; her big, dark eyes filled with unutterable gratitude; but through those next few hours of keen anxiety and doubt, she did not come near us, while her sister moved softly about the room where the child lay; now kissing him, now weeping over him, and now tending him gently and tenderly.

By the early morning all our fears were over. The physician left him, prescribing only warmth and quiet; and we felt that our little one was spared to us.

Several days had passed, and Willie was among us once more. There was no vigilance required now to prevent the restless little feet from wandering into danger. He hardly required the constant loving care with which he was surrounded. Reby was sitting upon the grass beside the little carriage in which he had been wheeled out upon the terrace. Tev was standing over the n



stringing a little bow for the child. I was on my old seat near them, chatting to them all and waiting for Nora, who was going to take me to see that miserable little dwelling she had discovered in the bog. Mrs. Elliot was in the house, napping.

'Nora is detaining you rather long, Aunt Bona. I hope you are not tired,' said Reby, gently raising her blue eyes to me.

'Tev,' cried Willie, pleadingly, 'carry me down to the lake.'

'No, dear,' replied Trevor, with a shudder, which I now always remarked when the child mentioned the water, 'not to-day.'

'Reby, carry me,' the child then urged.

'Oh no, Willie dear,' she answered, gently, 'I cannot do so.'

'Nora will,' he added, confidently, as Nora came up to us in her walking-dress. 'Nora, carry me down to the shore.'

'Certainly,' she said, raising the little wasted figure tenderly, and holding him in her arms; 'will you wait for me a few more minutes, auntie? Reby, will you run in to mamma? She was calling you, and I knew I should not be a sufficient substitute.'

'Nora, please to leave Willie with us,' began Tev, almost sternly, as Reby went to the house, and Nora prepared to descend the steps: 'I wish to keep him from the water, not lead him to it.'

'But I will not fish, Tev,' entreated the child; 'I won't indeed.'

Somehow I felt greatly relieved to hear him say even those few words touching on that wretched past day. I wanted the subject spoken of; it had been so carefully avoided by every one since. I should myself always speak, even of sad things like those; bringing them out of the clouds of mystery and secrecy, I think, takes a good deal of the gloom away; but then, I daresay, that is an old-fashioned notion.'

'Put him down, please, Nora,' said Tev, more gently. You shall go with me to fish, dear, whenever you like, but not alone. I have locked up all my fishing-rods, too.'

'And cannot Reby get them?'

'If Reby wants one, she shall have it at any time,' answered Tev, promptly.

'But cannot she get one for me?' inquired Willie, raising himself a little in Nora's arms, 'like she did before?'

I shall never forget the strange, sudden silence which fell among us, and yet it could scarcely have lasted half a dozen seconds.

'And it was you who broke your word, Tev,' continued the child, wonderingly, 'not me. Reby said you were going to fish, too, in the little bay beyond the park; and so I went, and you never came, Tev.'

'Willie,' said Trevor, his face full of a dark, stern wrath, 'who told you that?'

'Reby told me, Tev.'

'And who,' asked Tev, in a voice of intense, suppressed passion, 'gave you the fishing-rod out of my room?'

'Reby. Didn't you know, Tev?'

'And where was I? Where were we all?' continued Trevor, his strong, nervous fingers tight upon the back of the seat.

'I don't know,' answered the child, gazing at him, curiously; 'nobody was about but me and Reby, and I fished a good while, Tev.'

'Nora,' said Tev, raising his stern, white face to hers, 'for Heaven's sake, tell me more. Is any part of what I have heard true?'

'Corrigan found Willie, as you know, Trevor,' said Nora, with a new gentleness in her voice, as she read his pain: 'Corrigan rescued him, as you know, after he fell, but could not climb the ascent from the little bay with Willie in his arms, nor could he swim home with him; so he sat there, nursing him, and shouting for help; and when I rowed round there, of course I heard him. and took the boat in. Corrigan himself told you how the fall must have happened.'

'Yes,' replied Tev, shortly; and then he turned away, with a look almost like death upon his face; and we saw him no more all that day.

I was sitting on my favourite seat upon the south terrace at Rosscairne. Tev's guests were leaving him upon the morrow, and so I felt that I must not stay long in my solitude on that last evening. The two girls were sitting under the great cedar, each with a book. Both seemed a little sad at leaving, but I could not judge how deep the feeling might be. Reby knew nothing of the discovery Trevor had made, or else she would surely have hastened from Rosscairne before.

Tev, who had been standing talking with them, sauntered on to me; but, when he reached me, he had nothing to say, it seemed, and only lounged against the arm of my garden-chair, looking out, as I was doing, across the golden waters of Lough Erne, above which the sunset sky spread gorgeously.

'I am sorry the Elliots are going, Tev,' I said at last, just to rouse him.

'Are you?'

'Yes. Do you remember our opinions of them a month ago?'

'I forget,' replied Tev, much less as if he did forget, than as if he did not choose to remember.

'Don't you still think,' I said (and I think I acted it all very cleverly, though I would not say so if there were anyone else to say it for me), 'that Reby Elliot is a very pretty girl, and very gentle and soothing? And don't you like a girl who never ruffles you, and never excites you to anger or anxiety. Has she

not always been—as you said—tenderly and consistently kind to Willie?’

Tev did not answer, and I dared not look in his face.

‘And though I still like Nora, as I did then,’ I went on, placidly, ‘I quite agree with you that she is random and heedless; and has, before now, brought Willie to grief by jumping with him in the bog, and encouraging him to rebel against Charity. Oh! I do see now a great deal to object to in Nora; you have opened my eyes, Tev.’

‘Aunt Bona,’ he said at last, with a smile that had an unusual sadness in it, ‘I begin to think there is a mischievousness that is not harmful, and a sympathy that is not—sincere.’

‘Tev,’ I went on, coolly, ‘have you asked Reby Elliot to be your wife?’

‘No.’

The answer was sharp as well as short.

‘But you are leaving it very late, dear boy. They go quite early to-morrow. What will you do?’

‘I will do as I have always tried to do, Aunt Bona. I have Willie’s property and life in trust, and I will care for both.’

‘And nothing more, Tev, even if the wife you win would be your helper in this work?’

‘People all say this is a beautiful place,’ remarked Tev, as he looked around rather wearily upon the wide and sunny prospect; ‘and they will not remember, when they tell me so, that it is not my own. But, Aunt Bona, I should like to be loved, independent of it; not for its sake. And so——’

‘And so’—I thought in my own heart, as he did not say anything more—‘and so you will not ask Reby Elliot; and perhaps my own long wish will be fulfilled, after all.’

A glorious moon rode solemnly above the lake; whose waters, save for the silver line upon them, were as calm and still as were the tranquil heavens themselves.

I am not afraid of toothache as Mrs. Elliot is, so I determined to go out and enjoy the magnificent scene. I, too, was going home upon the morrow—if Tev would let me—and I should like to remember the perfect beauty of this last evening.

Walking slowly, in the fair, sweet moonlight, I thought over many things, and ended with the wish that, when I was away from Rosscairne, I could feel that Tev had another companion—a nearer, dearer, truer one. Not that I could ever be anything but true to him in weal or woe, but I mean more truly a companion for him, such a one as—however dear we may make all the relations of life—only a wife could be.

I stood to take one farewell glance, wishing there was such a view from my own cottage garden, when Nora came up to me very quietly.

‘Where have you been, dear?’ I asked, for I saw that she

had not come through the drawing-room window as I had done.

'I've been down to the lake shore, auntie, for the last time—I could not help it; I thought that such a lovely night might never come again.'

'And do you think so now, dear?' I asked, reading something in her shy, sweet face. 'Tev always says I am a good guesser; and I am very proud of it; for is it not Miss Austen who says there is talent in a lucky guess?'

'No, auntie,' answered Nora, softly.

'Where is Tev?'

'In the house. He went in to mamma, but he said I might stay out a few minutes with you. Why, here he is!'

And when Tev came up, and looked from me to Nora with a certain new and wonderful gladness filling his eyes, I said,

'Tev, Charity told you long ago that Nora made Willie quite unmanageable.'

I never heard a heartier laugh in all my life than Tev's, nor a shyer one than Nora's.

'And Nora,' I said, for I did not seem to want any words to tell them that all was to be according to my dearest wish, 'will the old servants all be dismissed, my dear?'

'Yes, Aunt Bona,' she answered, with her old saucy smile, 'if you dismiss them, not without. 'Oh! what mad and wilful things I have said, haven't I? Just to—to show that I didn't care about anything of Tev's.'

I laughed, understanding then just what I had guessed weeks before, that Nora had never imagined it possible that she could be loved, while her beautiful and petted elder sister was by; and so had, as it were, defied, as well as hidden, the love that had been growing within her heart for Trevor.

'Don't you think, Tev,' I then asked him, 'that you are acting with a little fickleness? You confessed to me long ago that you loved Reby best.'

'Aunt Bona,' returned Tev, with sudden, anxious earnestness, as he laid one hand on Nora's, 'I felt always that I ought to do so, because she was so gentle and tender to Willie, and seemed to take so great an interest in him. Nora, dear love, you understand this, don't you. I feasted my eyes upon her beauty, and hoped that I should soon grow to love her for Willie's sake, because—because one whom I *must* have loved even then, would not *seem* to be careful of him. Dearest, how little I knew of the quiet, unperceived care, and kindness, and love you gave him, which were care, and kindness, and love indeed. Aunt Bona, say how glad you are for me, for I know you are.'

I do not believe I did say it, though my whole heart was filled with joy, as I thought of the happiness in store for both.

And that happiness is theirs ! Writing this at my solitary fireside, ten years after that moonlight night when the old story was whispered on the lake shore—and living over again the time between—I can say with truth that my hopes for the happiness of those two, whom I love so well, have had a full assurance. There is no pleasanter house in Ireland than Rosscairne ; and though Trevor and Nora have children of their own now, yet not one is cherished with more tenderness, or loved with more devotion, than the young heir whose majority is to leave Tev and his wife so poor.

## MRS. DUNCAN'S ECCENTRICITY.

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THE little church stands high upon the hill at Crossmyroof. It is not a handsome church, nor curious, nor famous ; but I love it dearly, having lived all my life in its very shadow. We decorate it three times in every year—at Christmas, at Easter, and for the Harvest Thanksgiving service. But I took most pride in the Christmas decorations, and, being the vicar's eldest daughter, of course, the chief of the work (or of the pleasure) fell upon me. The children (I mean my brothers and sisters) helped me always, and we had one of our own servants when she could be spared, besides countless village volunteers ; but I always felt we should have been very much more incapable and unsuccessful if it had not been that old Mrs. Gotto made a point of having her grandson down at Crossmyroof for Christmas. He was so ready with his help ; so quick to see what would look well ; and so tall and strong ; that nothing we wished to attempt was impossible when he was there ; and nothing in the world then was a trouble to me. Perhaps that was why I took most pride in the Christmas decorating, for it is pleasant to meet with hearty sympathy and help in anything one undertakes ; yet perhaps it was only because Christmas was always such a happy time with me. Sometimes Eleanor M'Laird came up from the Hall to help us, and when she did, she generally laughed a little, low, aristocratic laugh over my garlands and texts, and pretended to think the children had done them all. I was often glad that we were in the church when she said so, because hot words rose from my heart, and would have left my lips, perhaps, if we had not been there. She was an only child and very rich ; and I was the eldest of eight, and had never known what it was to have a shilling the spending of which had not been anticipated. Her father was lord of the manor, with £3,000 a year, and my father was vicar of the parish, with £300 ; but I think if *she* had felt the difference between us less, I should have felt it more—I

mean, felt it in a better way. Christmas Day fell on a Saturday that year, and it was getting quite dusk on the Friday afternoon before we had finished. Eleanor had brought a magnificent bouquet of hot-house flowers for the chancel-table, and I stood watching her while she arranged them. 'They will not be moved, I hope,' she said, stepping down into the aisle again, and addressing me, 'nor the cross I have placed above? James, just see that the cross is safe.'

James was the footman who had been sent to walk home with her; and while he did as she had bidden him, she repeated her question to me.

'No one will move them, Miss M'Laird,' I answered.

'Low-church people have such cramped ideas sometimes,' she said, passing on; and I sat down again to the wreath I was making. How different the vicarage flowers were from those which she had brought from the conservatories at the Hall! I thought this, working on with my shy-looking little roses, while the whispering shadows glided in under the heavy porch, and crept along the narrow windows. I had heard voices in the churchyard, after Eleanor had left the church, and I knew that Marq Gotto (his name was really Marquis, but we always called him Marq) he met her just outside the porch, and had stopped to chat. She was generally very gracious to him; perhaps because he did not live in Crossmyroof; perhaps because he had that charm about him which compelled people to like him; perhaps because he was so handsome that she could forget, while she was talking to him, that he was only a lawyer struggling to win his own way in a world over whose wide extent, he used to say, there was no one else to win it for him.

'Is it finished?' asked Marq, standing beside me in the twilight. 'If so, let me hang it, before we are shrouded in utter darkness.'

I tried to hasten, but the string got entangled every second.

'Nina, your hands are cold and tired, dear. Give me the wreath.'

I gave it at once, helping him to hold it, while his strong fingers dexterously tied in the last ivy and laurel leaves.

'Now and me the nails, and see how artistically I will put it up.'

I stood at the foot of the ladder, while the children, who had finished their task, gathered round. When the wreath was hung, he stepped down among us, and—quite unconsciously, I think—laid his hand on mine as he looked up at it.

'The flowers look very commonplace beside Miss M'Laird's, I said, with a sigh. His eyes were filled with laughter as he turned and looked into my face.

'I think Miss M'Laird's garlands are as like herself as Miss Callaway's garlands are like *herself*, and my fingers could not weave a wreath of hers, Nina.'

'Mine looks pretty, now,' I observed, still looking up.

'Ours, you mean—ours, remember. How long will it live?'

'Only over Christmas,' put in Tom, practically.

'Indeed, sir!' laughed Marq. 'And may I inquire to what Christmas you allude? Now, Nina, is there anything else for me to do in this way?'

'I think not.'

But, though the children went home then, we two still lingered there, and the brilliant Nativity scene upon the eastern window grew more and more real, while the light faded without.

'I have one thing more to do, you know, Marq,' I said, as the choir came in. 'We have to sing the anthem over to papa.'

'That's right. I will stand here and listen.'

The singers lighted the candles on the organ, and bent over them to bring their light upon the music; but I knew the grand old anthem well, and stood back in the shadow, from where I could see Marq leaning at the end of our seat. Often, in the time that followed, did I sadly remember how heedlessly I had sung the comforting words that night, while I watched his listening figure, and while the gorgeous picture of the birth we sang of faded utterly. Papa was detained in the village, so Marq and I walked slowly on together down the quiet lane; the darkness of the Christmas evening deepening and deepening, and no star yet venturing out into the chilling air. Yet we lingered at every step, thinking nothing of the cold. Marq was telling me of that strange old Mrs. Duncan, who, ever since I can remember, has lived alone at the old Priory, on the other side of the hill. Long ago I had heard the story of her cruelty to her step-son, and the quarrel between them, when his father died and left all his wealth unconditionally to her—the will never even mentioning his only son; but Marq was telling me other things—how Mrs. Duncan always sought his advice now on the most trifling matters of business; how often she sent for him when she was in London; how she was now ill at Torquay, and he was going to her in a few days.

'When lawyers get one good client they think their fortune's made, Marq, don't they?' I asked.

'I cannot quite answer for lawyers in general being so weak, dear; but one lawyer in particular is. I feel my fortune made. My one want now is, some one to share it.'

He was laughing, of course, and I laughed too.

'It is too great for you to spend alone, then?'

'It will be when I've earned it. I intend to have such a beautiful little home; a white house, with roses and jasmine all over it, and a garden full of wonderful scents and unexpected corners—just like your own, Nina. And, of course, I shall want some one to share it with me.'

'Your grandmother,' I suggested.

'No, dear. My venerable ancestress is a strong Conservative,



declining to leave her ingle. And can you expect her primitive residence to hold me when I am a great man ?'

'You remember the inquisitive bells of Stepney ?'

'You want to know when that will be, do you ? With your usual far-sightedness, you would insinuate that I am counting my chickens too soon. Never mind ; I feel that I shall win success at last. Faint heart, as you are aware, never won fair lady ; and, as I mean to win her, my heart is very strong. That is the one great hope that leads me on, Nina. Stand here a moment, dear, out in the quiet night with me, and tell me that that hope shall have its fulfilment.' We were at the gate then, and I heard papa's step behind us on the frosty road. A new nervousness came upon me in my great happiness, and I hurriedly put my fingers on the latch. Marq laid his hand upon them.

'I will not keep you here, my dear one ; I will not urge you for your answer now. Give it me to-morrow night—on Christmas night. Ah ! little Nina, let it be kind. I have loved you with all the strength of my heart. You have been the one bright hope of my life. Let the pleasant home of which I dream be mine. Give me the little wife I seek, to make it bright and beautiful.'

Quite quietly we walked together up the garden ; but, when we reached the lighted hall, I ran away upstairs.

After tea we had a long, happy evening of Christmas games and music, and Marq seemed to lead everything, and was the merriest of us all. Not till the bells had chimed the Christmas in did we think of separating. Then the children were sent to bed, and Marq stood at the hall door, lingering over his good night ; the frosty breath of the new-born day filling the hall, and we laughing and shivering as we stood there. He loitered so long that they all left us ; then I gave him my hand, that I might follow them.

'I wonder whether I shall reach home safely ?' he mused, holding it while he looked out into the darkness. 'Nina, let me take what light I can. Let me have another look into the face I love.'

Moving back into the light, my cheeks burning, I stood and smiled my last good-bye ; and outside, in the gloom, Marq raised his hat and brightly answered me.

*Our wreath*, he had said—Marq's and mine. I thought it looked lovely, even among Eleanor's rare and beautiful flowers. The children and I—reaching the church first of all the congregation—walked up the aisle, whispering how beautiful the glistening leaves and berries looked when the slanting sun-rays touched them. Then I took my place in the choir, and in little straggling groups the people passed under the porch, bringing in the Christmas sunshine on their faces. Old Mrs. Gotto came on Marq's arm, and she stood a moment just within the door,

looking round upon the decorations. Marq looked up too, but his eyes were very grave, and I fancied that his thoughts were far away. Then we sat among the winter flowers, in fitful gleams of sunshine, while my father read us the old, sweet Story which has hallowed this day for every age to come. And the glad words of the anthem filled the church, as if we, too, in joy and thanksgiving, would try to join the angel's glorious hymn to-day.

We had been home only a few minutes, and were standing round the fire, when Marq came in. I wondered to see him, because he never came to us on Christmas Day until evening, and I especially wondered when—as he shook hands with us all—he wished us a merry Christmas ; seeming to forget he had done so in the early morning.

‘My Christmas greeting heralds my good-bye,’ he said, speaking rather nervously. ‘Mr. Callaway, what do you think has happened ?’

Of course father said he could not think at all.

‘Old Mrs. Duncan has died at Torquay, and— and— left me her property.’

‘Nonsense ! You joke too gravely, Marq.’

‘But it is not a joke, sir ; it is a fact.’

‘But she has a son, Mr. Gotto,’ began Tom, staring into Marq’s face.

‘Her husband had one.’

‘And has she left her husband’s wealth away from her husband’s son ?’ I asked, breathing very quietly ; and Marq simply answered,

‘Yes,’ without looking at me as he spoke. ‘Since the quarrel, nearly twenty years ago,’ he added, when father questioned him, ‘she has never heard of this son, and has never tried to hear of him. He is not mentioned in her will, they tell me.’

‘And the will is valid ?’

‘Perfectly so. The property was her own, to bequeath as she would.’

‘Then the father’s will, long ago, was as unjust as the mother’s is now.’

‘Old Mr. Duncan was entirely ruled by his wife, I believe, and left her uncontrolled possession of the whole estate.’

‘But he never could have imagined that she would will it away from his only son,’ my father said. ‘Why, the name and the estate have gone together for two hundred years !’

‘Was Mrs. Duncan quite clear in her mind when this eccentric act was done ?’ mother inquired.

‘Quite so, as far as medical judgment goes.’

‘There is no difficulty in deciding *what* was wrong in her mind,’ said my father, gravely. ‘How inveterate must have been her hatred !’

'You will be a rich man, Marq,' said Tom, delightedly; 'and you'll live at the Priory, and be greater than the M'Lairds!'

'Are you really very rich and great, Marq?' asked Elsie, raising her small, inquisitive face, and trying—as I think we were all trying—to read Marq's.

He stooped upon the rug beside her, and I fancied that he did it to avoid our eyes, as he answered,

'Yes; I am a very rich man, Elsie darling, but not great yet. That I must try to be, now that the riches are mine.'

The words were spoken very slowly and very thoughtfully; and they fell upon my heart as a heavy shadow sometimes falls upon a sunny spot. He had to start for Devonshire so early in the morning, he said, that he must bid us good-bye then, for his grandmother would not hear of his leaving her again that day. We all shook hands with him as we stood round the fire; then he hurried away, saying he should be late for dinner, as he had to go round to the Priory.

'He speaks of the place in a tone of proprietorship already,' father said, laughing. 'It will be good to have such a neighbour. He will go into Parliament, of course, and be a great man, as he says.'

'Poor Mr. Duncan!' mother said, as she and I went upstairs. And whether it was because I thought of him, or because I thought of Marq, or because I thought of myself, I do not know; but the joy and sunshine of that Christmas Day were gone. I had no fire in my bed-room, else I think I should have sat before it all that night, wondering and wondering. Yet I daresay that would not have made things any clearer to me than they seemed as I stood, for those few minutes, at the staircase window. It was to-night that I was to have told him whether the home he said he dreamed of should be his. Another home had been given him now, and he was free. Since I had not accepted his love, he could not consider himself bound to me. He would go into a different world now, and see how much more wisely he could choose. 'I know he will be a great man,' I whispered to myself, 'and I will rejoice in it, as I live on quietly here. Perhaps, sometimes, when he feels tired of his state and grandeur, he will like to rest a few minutes in the old garden, with "its wonderful scents and unexpected corners," and I shall be his friend—only his friend—always true to him in my heart, whether he knows it or not. Oh, I am glad I could not tell him last night how I loved him!' Yet though I said I was glad, and pictured the quiet friendship I would feel for him, my heart beat so quickly each morning when the letters came, that I dared not trust myself to look at them; and, while I waited for them to be claimed, each breath I drew hurt me.

Week after week went by, and no tidings came of him—no tidings for us at least. Sometimes old Mrs. Gotto told us where

he was, but not often, and never what he was doing. Spring came. The roses and jasmine, on the white walls of my home, blossomed in their first fresh beauty ; looking in at my window and reminding me of many a happy spring-time past, while the birds sang hopefully of many a happy spring to come. But still he never came.

Dreamily, in its full and perfect beauty, the summer followed ; on all the land lay its flashing, radiant smile, but through these long, bright days he did not come. I listened to the reapers singing at their work ; I listened to the larks echoing their song among the soft, white clouds ; but through all the joyous music of the autumn days, there rang for me a sad, sad strain, because he did not come. Then, slowly and steadily, there crept to my feet the lengthening shadows of that long winter, whose coming I so sorely dreaded, because of the memories it would bring.

It was Christmas-eve once more, and I had just brought into the church my last armful of glistening holly-boughs from the porch. Under the pulpit stairs sat Eleanor, sewing letters of box-leaves on white muslin—'FEAR NOT.' The words grew under her fingers, and I read them again and again as I stood resting near her. She was talking to father quietly and rapidly as she worked, but I did not follow her words. Now and then I heard 'chasubles,' 'tunics,' 'albs,' 'biretta,' and I suppose he understood, though he hardly spoke at all ; but the only words which went to my heart were those her fingers left upon the long, white scroll. I turned again to my work, ashamed of the feeling which had been upon me all the morning. I would not think again of one who had been used to make this task so light to me, in the years gone by ; I would think none but happy, grateful, Christmas thoughts.

'Why have you left that bare space on the wall, Nina ? Shan't you put a wreath up, as you did last year ?'

'No, Tom, I've finished now.'

Eleanor, who had seen her text put up, and was leaving the church, wrapped in her rich, soft furs, hesitated a moment, looking curiously into my face, where the colour had risen—sorely against my will.

'Who made the wreath that hung there last year ?' she asked Tom.

'Nina and Mr. Gotto.'

'Have you heard of Mr. Gotto lately ?' she asked, turning to me.

'No.'

'He is in London now. He is coming down to stay with us before he takes possession of the Priory. Papa helps him at present in the personal management of the estate, but we expect him soon.'

‘How soon?’

I asked it in a voice so still and passionless, that it surprised me when I heard it.

‘Perhaps to-night; I know he will come on as quickly as he can. He agrees with us that the Priory ought to be occupied. Now I will bid you good evening, Miss Callaway.’

I had been going to give her my earnest Christmas wishes, but now my hands were tight upon the rails, and my tongue felt hot and dry.

‘Then you won’t put a wreath up there, Nina?’

‘No, no

‘How very decidedly you shake your head! Then we’ve finished, I suppose. I shall stop for the practice, and walk home with you.’

As Tom spoke, he gathered up a few stray leaves and bits of string which he had let fall after the church had been swept, and I carried with me the flowers I had not used. They were only the old simple flowers from our own garden and little greenhouse, but I thought how bright and fresh they looked when I laid them down upon my own seat in the choir. We tried over our new anthem in the fading light; but father, who stood to listen just where Marq had stood last year, decided that he would rather hear the old one. So we sang it once over; then, with swimming eyes, I went away, and never knew I left the flowers lying there.

The snow lay upon the churchyard grass next morning, but a path was cleared up to the porch, where the pure white flakes clung to the dark old wood-work. How cold the church was! I sat and shivered in my place, before I even cared to look at the effect of our decorations. Eleanor’s cross was more beautiful than ever this year. Did it make her very happy to live among such beautiful flowers? Would it make Marq happy?

Thinking of him, my eyes wandered to where, upon that happy day a year ago, our wreath had hung; and—what did it mean? There—just in the old spot, and woven of the old flowers—another wreath was hanging now! The colour rushed to my face; a hot light burnt in my eyes. Who but Marq himself could have done this? I recognised the flowers I had left in my seat last night; I recognised the taste which had arranged them; and then I forgot all about the cold, and a great joy filled my heart, as completely as the triumphant organ-notes filled the church. He came in with old Mrs. Gotto on his arm; and behind him walked a stooping, sunburnt, grey-haired gentleman, with a face lined thickly by something which had gone more deep than care.

But I did not trust myself to look at Marq, and when we came out into the churchyard they were gone. As we lingered round the fire at home, I could not help feeling sure that he

would come in to join us, just as he had come that day a year ago ; yet, when I really heard his footstep, I did not dare to turn, so long had I vainly listened for it ! The children clustered round him, so I was the last whom he greeted.

‘Nina, a merry Christmas !’

The words were so gay, and yet so earnest, that I was ashamed of my own sudden shyness, and tried to answer in the same frank tone.

‘I am come, you see, Elsie,’ he said, taking my little sister on his knee as he sat down among us, ‘and nobody says how nice it is to see me.’

‘Are you come to live at the Priory now?’ asked Tom, eagerly.

‘No.’

‘Who was with you in church to-day, Marq?’ asked my father.

‘Mr Duncan, sir. He is staying with us over to-day ; then he takes possession of his own estate.’

‘What ! old Mrs. Duncan’s step-son ?’ many of us exclaimed. ‘Is *he* come back ?’ But father only said, quietly, ‘So I thought.’

‘Yes, he has come back—from the very farthest corner of the earth, one may say.’

‘And did *you* bring him back, Marq?’ I asked, feeling how proudly I was looking up into his face.

‘Yes, Nina, I brought him back, with the aid of many lawful and unlawful means.’

‘And—and—the wealth is his now ?’

‘The wealth has always been his, Nina ; but there were some forms for me to go through ; and those, with our long search and much travelling, have taken up a whole long year. Did you remember Duncan, sir?’ he added, turning quickly to father. ‘Did you recognise him ?’

‘Scarcely, Marq. He was nothing more than a handsome, careless lad in those days ; now he looks a middle-aged man ; one, too, who has passed through a hard and bitter battle with the world, and with himself, too.’

‘I wonder what old Mrs. Duncan would have done, if she had known how her will was to be slighted ?’ put in Tom, laughing.

‘Perhaps,’ I said, looking into the fire, while the cheek next Marq grew very hot indeed, ‘she knew what Marq would do.’

‘If she knew him well, she may have guessed it,’ mother added, gently.

Yet I—thinking I knew Marq so well—never had guessed it. He laughed, giving Elsie a hasty kiss, and depositing her on my lap.

‘I must go now,’ he said, ‘or Mr. Duncan will have exhausted all my grandmother’s reminiscences of his ancestry. May I come in as usual for the evening ?’

Everyone answered eagerly, except myself ; but he smiled at me, just as if I had done so.

What a happy day that was ! And in the evening, when the fires burnt brightest, and the shutters were closed, and the curtains drawn, Marq came. The urn had just been carried into the dining-room, and I was in there alone, making the tea, when I heard him hang his hat and coat in the hall.

We were so many, I thought, that it would not do for me to put in a spoonful of tea for each of us, and one for the pot, but I did put in three extra ones for Marq ; then I lingered, rearranging the flowers on the table, and wondering whether Marq had ever sat down to such a formidable children's tea since he had last been among us. Then it was time to ring the tea-bell.

As I turned to leave the room, he met me, coming in with his old smile even more bright and tender than it used to be.

Nina, this is Christmas Night, you know.'

And tea-time,' I added, laughing, as he took my hands in his. 'I said I should come for my answer on Christmas Night.'

'You said so, but never came.'

'Dearest, do you not understand now why I did not come then ? Could I come until I knew what life I asked you to share with me ? Could I offer myself to you a rich man, Nina, when I knew that very soon I should probably be poor again ? You, I know, would have understood me, if I had told you what I meant to do ; but it would have been unfair to you in the eyes of others. If—there had been no one to claim the wealth, after all, but myself, of course I could honourably have asked you to share it with me ; but not while I felt I held it only in trust. I was to come for my answer on Christmas Night, Nina ; and here I am.'

'And, Marq—here I am, too.'

And then his brave, happy face bent down to mine, and neither of us spoke at first in our full content.

'Nina, what have you thought of me through this year of silence ?' Marq asked me, presently.

I did not answer that, but shyly took my place before the tea-tray.

'Ah ! little Nina, it is impossible that you have trusted me just so firmly and entirely as I have trusted you.'

I knew I had not—oh, so well I knew it ! And I told him so.

'You saw our wreath, Nina ? Did it tell you what I meant it should ?'

'Yes ; and more, Marq.'

'It is very, very good to feel that that waiting time is over,' he said, leaning over my chair, while I looked unmeaningly into the tea-pot, and asked him if he would please ring the tea-bell

‘Presently. The tea will be all the better for standing a few minutes longer. Duncan is so anxious to see you, Nina. He says he must always look upon us as his two first and firmest friends; and that the Priory must be always home to us. But, dear, through this long, lonely year, I have been working with other aims besides the—relieving of my conscience. I have been working for that home I used to dream of; and now I feel it within my grasp.’

‘And the roses and the jasmine?’ I asked, looking up, and trying to speak easily, though my cheeks were crimson. He answered me quite differently from what I expected, and I began to put sugar into the cups at random.

‘Will *you* come with the roses and jasmine, Nina? Surely, then, I shall have waited long enough, my dear one!’

‘Oh, Marq! do ring the tea-bell.’

For I knew the tea would be undrinkably strong, if we waited any longer; and everyone would laugh at me for putting in so much extra—just for Marq.



## A SISTER'S STORY.

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### I.

WE were waiting tea for David. He was so often late that this was no unusual occurrence. The lamps were not brought in and little Winnie was reading in the firelight, while I sat watching Erle, as he stood upon the rug, with that look of thought he so often wore. I had fallen into one of my dreamy moods, as I often did when we sat in the firelight thus. I went back in my thoughts to the time when Erle and I were young and merry-hearted boy and girl, and Winifred a baby ; to the time when the dark cloud fell upon our home, and the fatherless children were left orphans with only the little one to take the vacant place ; and from that, looking on into the misty future, when I should resign the first place in my brothers'—Ah, well ! who can follow the dreamy fancies of one whose life is blended with the lives of others, and who has lost all anticipations for herself alone ? So I dreamed on, looking into Erle's face—beautiful, though careworn, and with lines of silver which age has not brought into the dark hair—and from that to Winnie's bright, childish face. Surely she and David were unlike Erle and me, yet there was not so much difference in our ages as anyone would think. I—with my serious, gloomy face—looked far more than three years older than David. But he would not have it so. He would see no difference between me as I then was, and the shy girl of eighteen whom he left when he first went from home nine years ago.

We were very proud of David and Winnie, and used to talk for hours together, we two elder ones, of their lives to come—with some imagining, even then, of how differently the sun would shine upon us and upon them. I had been used to think that Erle's heart, as well as mine, was bound up in those two ; but I had to learn that he had thoughts and hopes beyond. I had just

come back from my dreaming, to think that David was even later than usual, and that the room was very silent without him, when Winnie closed her book, and spoke with a laugh.

'Effie, this story would suit you exactly ; for it ends happily for everybody'—for they used to joke me about being, as they said, so very practical. But I was rather proud of it, and encouraged it as far as I could ; so, as I got up and rang the bell, I said,

'And so it ought.'

Winnie, leaning forward on her low seat, looked up at Erle.

'Erle, if you were an author—which you will never be—and were writing about a good, true knight, who does everything nobly, and falls in love with a princess, and a poor little maiden is in love with him, how would you make it end ?'

'Does the princess love him ?'

'Of course ; everybody loves him.'

'Then he must marry the princess, and the other girl had better die. That is how it generally ends, I think.'

His voice was low, and I thought he spoke more earnestly than he need have done for such a trifle.

'And is that ending happily for everybody ?' laughed Winnie.

'How could it end more happily for the one not loved ?'

'He doesn't know anything about it, Fred,' said David's merry voice, as Winifred sprang up to greet him ; 'I will tell you how *he* would end it. The princess would discover a worm i' the bud on the damask cheek of the humble young spinster, and, though she adored the knight with all the ardour of a princess's nature, would resign him nobly, and retire into privacy, until she made her appearance at the wedding in high life. For the knight, at last fully appreciating the charms of a domestic character, would marry the maiden all forlorn—not so forlorn, just then, as might be, considering she was in the full enjoyment of a royal husband, and lots of wedding gifts from her magnanimous sovereign. There, whatever he may say, that would be Erle's version of the story, wouldn't it Fred ? Effie, I'm afraid I'm rather late to-night.'

'Such a new offence, Day.'

'I'm certain the tea has been made a long time,' said he, gravely taking his seat at the table, 'and that our little mother' (that was one of Winnie's names for me) 'has a smouldering fear that it is cold, and that Erle will be cross when he finds it out.'

'I should like to know which of my two brothers would be the crosser in such a case,' said Winnie, bending over the back of his chair ; 'and Day, please, what is a smouldering fear ?'

'When little girls learn foreign languages,' observed David, cutting away at the bread, 'they must confine themselves to simple and arranged sentences ; but a young man who is a master of his native tongue may use it as he pleases. Erle, I

have a message for you ; Effie, I have a parcel for you ; Fred, I have nothing for you.'

'And how did you carry that, Day ?'

'Oh ! I managed—being strong.'

'Well, go on. I will listen to Erle's message, and share Effie's present, that will do for me. Which is to come first ?'

'Erle,' he asked, 'have you been over to Upton to-day ? Not another troublesome day's work with the steward, I hope, and that highly injured race of tenants ?'

'No ; everything is going on well. The new cottages are nearly finished, and the tenants all ready with their rents, I believe, while everyone is ready to greet you gladly when you go to take possession.'

'I am too comfortable at home to think of that, but I'm afraid all this bothers you sadly, Erle.'

'My dear boy, I don't know what I should do without it ; but when is my message forthcoming ?'

'Bide a wee. Before that comes I have a piece of general intelligence for the company at large'—he turned from Erle as he spoke, and, after the merry tones, his voice sounded almost constrained ; yet it may have been only because his head was bent so low while he was speaking, or perhaps, indeed, it was my fancy that made these few words sound different—'Mr. St. George and Hope have come home a month earlier than they intended, and I saw them to-day.'

Winnie was the only one who answered. Erle looked at me for a moment ; then, meeting my eyes, he lowered suddenly, as the dark crimson spread slowly over his face. I busied myself with the cups, not looking up again.

'Where did you see them, Day ?' asked Winnie ; and the careless, natural question was a relief to all.

'I saw their carriage at the station, and I waited for them. They are in town still, with Fletcher, the attorney. It was the trial that brought them back. Mr. St. George is very glad to be at home, though.'

'And Hope is not, I suppose ?' said Winnie, laughing. 'Hope has the peculiarity of never being glad to come home, hasn't she, David ?'

'Hope,' said I, pouring David's third cup of tea, and speaking because no one else answered, 'is fonder of home than anyone I know, and she makes a home, too, more than anyone.'

'It is a lonely old place without her, anyway,' said David, carelessly.

'Hopeless, eh, Erle ?' asked Winnie, demurely. 'But tell us how she looked, Day.'

'The same as always, I think.'

'She could scarcely change much in four months, Winnie,' said I. 'But what was Erle's message ?'

'Something, of course, about this law-suit; but I said I should never remember.'

'I think Mr. St. George looks upon you, Erle, as a brother defendant, instead of a possible juror; and now, let me see, where is Effie's parcel?'

It was a little painting of a fisherman's wife and child, looking with frightened, eager faces over the stormy sea for a boat they could not find. A remembrance Hope had brought me from abroad—a little remembrance that has been near me through years of happiness and sorrow, and, among many unfamiliar objects, is first to meet my eyes when I raise them from this paper as I write. After I had looked at it and admired it quietly for a long time, and Winnie had put her little head on one side and criticised it artistically, I asked David to hang it for me. As he took it from my hand, looking at it with an absent kind of look, he said,

'I think they will call here on their way home. Hope said, when I left them, that they would surely call, if they passed at any respectable hour. She is very fond of you, Effie.'

'Not more fond of me,' said I, 'than of you and Erle and Winnie. But, Davie, you are worse than incorrigible not to have told me this before.'

'Don't be cross, little mother. There is no scope for your celebrated housekeeping talents to display themselves to-night. It was in anticipation of mighty preparations on your part, I'm sure, that Hope said so emphatically that they could hardly stay a minute, as dinner would be waiting for them at home.'

'What a comfort it will be to have them back,' said Winnie again. 'The whole country looks desolate round Oakley Court when they are away. Erle, your rides to Upton are more pleasant when you can call there, aren't they?'

Erle had seated himself at the piano, and Winnie stood beside him. As she spoke, he looked up, still playing, and nodded, with a strange light in his eyes.

'Sing one of my songs, Erle,' she whispered, coaxingly; and, as he began to sing, I heard carriage wheels pass under the windows. I knew David heard them, too, because he lost the restless look he had had while talking to me. Erle and Winnie heard nothing but the music; and, as they were far away from the door, they never even turned as David opened it.

Twelve years, with their lights and shadows, with their waiting and hoping, have passed me by since that night; but before me now, as clear as then, comes the picture that I saw when Hope came in among us in her youth and radiant beauty. Passing David with a smile, she took both my hands, and kissed me eagerly. I held her from me, with a strange intent look into her face, while she blushed a soft, bright blush. I held her, fascinating her to look at me, for I would not have her turn and

see—it did not matter that I should see—how white David's face had grown, and how he strove to hide the trembling of his lips.

It did not matter that I should see that Erle was watching him, a new light breaking upon his face; a new sorrow—a strange, half-comprehended sorrow—in the tender, passionate eyes. Looking back, I know that a single glance had fixed them on my mind for ever, but then I thought I saw them all the time that I was gazing in Hope's face.

'Are there many changes, Effie, in these long four months?' She asked it laughingly, but I could not answer so. The dainty face was as pretty as it had been when we parted, and yet there *was* a change, and I knew what it was. That night I read its secret as I read theirs; but I answered her, quite lightly,

'David seemed so uncertain whether you were changed, that I thought I must look for myself.'

Then I could let her turn to greet Erle and Winnie. We talked all together, till Erle turned aside with Mr. St. George, and Hope followed him with her eyes.

'How well he looks to-night, Effie! You cannot feel anxious about him now,' she said, in her low, earnest voice. 'How different he is from most of the men one meets!'

I did not wonder that she had said it, but the light in his eyes awed me strangely, and I could not answer. Then we spoke of my picture and of their journey.

'We are all very much obliged to the trial for bringing you home, Mr. St. George,' said I; 'but I hope you won't go back when it is over.'

'Hope shall decide,' he said, looking down upon her. 'I am afraid she will not let me rest. I should not like her to hear me tell you, but I assure you I heard her promise a certain Austrian count to be back again within a month.'

Never shall I forget that moment, could I live to forget all else. I cannot try to tell of the dead, despairing feeling that seemed to fall upon me. My first quick thought was that I must not look at Erle or David, yet I saw the two faces more clearly, it seemed to me, than I had ever done before. The still, white agony of Erle's shocked me even less than the firm, compressed determination to bear—so strange on David's merry lips.

There was nothing that could be hidden after that; yet it was only a minute before Hope touched her father's arm.

'If you must make remarks, please try to make them intelligible, sir. What do you mean?'

He laughed heartily.

'I mean that I heard him ask you, and that you would, if your poor old father could be induced to listen to reason.'

'And why, papa? Tell that.'

'Because he thought you were necessary to him, I suppose.'

'Effie, don't listen to his nonsense;' a really anxious look

was on her face, though she tried to smile. 'The Austrian count is an old gentleman with a delicate, helpless young wife, who has taken a fancy to me ; and she is so anxious to come to England, that we said if he did not bring her, we would go and fetch them.'

So that was all, and the lesson had been needlessly learned ! But then, more than ever, I felt I could not look at my brothers, and I joined nervously in the conversation till our visitors left us.

'What was the matter, Effie ? what was the matter with us all ?' asked Winnie, pushing back her bright hair, as she came to wish me good night. 'I did not enjoy this visit at all ; did you ?'

'It was so short, dear,' I said, hesitating. 'Good night.'

David had taken the St. Georges down to their carriage ; and, when I heard his footsteps pass the window, I knew why he walked away alone. Erle was standing against the chimney-piece, looking down into the fire, his face half hidden. When we had been alone for a few minutes, he said, in a low, sad voice, without turning—

'Did you know of this before, Effie ?'

'Of what ?'

'Of David and—Hope.'

'How, Erle ? Why do you put their names together ?'

A lump was rising in my throat, and I dared not look at him.

'Did you know that David—loved her ?'

I looked up at him in a very passion of grief.

'Oh, Erle, Erle, until to-night I never guessed what misery she could bring.'

'Hush ! Is this my little Effie in anger with Hope ? Dear, why should she bring misery ?'

'Because—because, oh, Erle, she doesn't love him, and there is nothing but sorrow.'

'She does—not love him ?' He only repeated the words, slowly and dreamily.

'And, Erle, he does not know, and there is suffering to come.'

'No, Effie, not for him. How do you know she does not love him ?'

'Do *you* not know it ?'

'No . . . before Heaven, no !'

'Then I cannot be sure ; but, if I read her rightly, it is not David she loves.'

There was a long silence. Then Erle spoke, steadily and firmly :

'It is quite clear to me, what is right and best. He could make her happy, and she could make his life bright. It will come all right when I am gone.'

'Erle, what do you mean ? Are you going away ?'

'Only for a time, Effie dear. When it has happened, I will come back to you. Little mother, you will not spoil my plan? You could not do it.'

'Oh, Erle, not that! Look back upon your life. Slighted by our father; set aside for a younger son by the mother you loved so well; the property that should have been yours given to him; not strong enough for the life you chose, and giving up all your suffering years to us.—Oh, Erle, dear Erle, and should he take this too?' Then my love and sympathy rose up in all its strength, and I cried out passionately for his right.

But he stopped me as I clung to him. 'Hush, Effie! I have done nothing yet of the trust that was left with me.'

I looked up, tearless now, determined not to add to the pain that was so visible upon his face. 'But Erle, if he guesses this, he will never be happy again.'

'He shall not guess.'

'And, Erle, suppose—suppose she loves you better?'

'No need to think of that. She—*cannot*.'

For hours we sat there, silent sometimes for long minutes, with our hearts too full for speech. The faint dawn was breaking, like a line of hope far away, when at last Erle left me, everything clear and distinct in the future he had marked out.

As I closed the drawing-room door, David came out of the library. He started on seeing me, and asked why I was so late. 'Making plans for to-morrow, Effie?' I said 'Yes,' and smiled to see that, but for the wistful look in his blue eyes, his face had its old brightness. 'And have *you* been making plans for the morrow, Day?' He was beside me then, and I put my hand upon his shoulder as I asked it. He answered with a simple 'Yes,' but looked into my face, as if to see how much I meant.

'Then, David, I hope they were of love and happiness, for I think that your to-morrow will have both. Good night.'

He held me fast. 'Effie, our future is to be spent together—do you forget that?—so, of course, there must be love and happiness.'

'Ah! David, we shall see.'

'Effie, you are smiling with your heart full, You guessed aright this evening; at least you saw it, and you know all that my own heart knows. It is like you to teach me hope, dear little mother; but we know each other too well to hide the truth.'

'David, I know it all, and I say it still.'

He kissed me with his own bright smile, in which there was so much of the hope he was not conscious of, and then we parted. The line of light was broad and bright in the east when I at last left watching it.

## II.

'Effie, why do you not try to persuade Erle against this wild scheme? I wish you would; he would listen to you. Why should he go? If he wants money, there is plenty lying idle; and, as for occupation, I'm sure I don't know what my place will do without him. I wish he would give it up. Do urge him to do so.'

'I don't think he will, Day. He is bent upon it, as you said; and really I think it may be better for him.'

'Effie, this is unlike you. What do you need for him? A good, brave man, to whom everything is easy, whom everybody loves. Why, Effie, what can you wish for him, more than he has?'

'Perhaps, David, he will value these things more, when he has learned what it is to *long for* home and rest. Anyway, I believe he knows best, and will be led by wiser, tenderer hands than ours. And, as you never questioned yet his good and noble aims, do not begin now, dear. He never disappointed us yet, did he?'

David turned away with a sigh, and I bent my eyes upon the tear-wet work that was to go with Erle.

So upon a bright May morning, when the early sunshine turned the tear-drops on the flowers into dancing, glittering gems, silently and tearlessly I bade good-bye to my best-loved brother, and he set out with David—so sad and so unconscious—for Portsmouth. How I envied Winifred her passionate sobs, as I held her closely in my arms, in the rooms that had grown suddenly cheerless and chilling!

While our grief was fresh as ever, David came back, with last messages for us all; and with a mournful look upon his face, which, I said to myself over and over, would soon give place to the gladness that was natural there; but which deepened and deepened day by day until that one day came.

We had had a cheerful, loving letter from Erle, describing, brightly and amusingly, his bachelor home and strange life; and David had taken it with him when he rode to Upton, that he might read a part of it to Mr. St. George and Hope on his way home. It was a cheerless October afternoon, I thought, as I drew the curtains slowly, looking down the darkening road, and listening for the quick tread of David's horse, which I knew so well, even far off. Winnie startled me at last. 'Listen, little mother, there is Day; but how slowly he comes!' While the groom took his horse, I stood with the curtain still in my hand.

Winnie ran out to meet him, and, when I saw his head bent so low to her as they came in, I knew he hid his face from me. We dined quite merrily that evening. Often since have I



wondered how we did it. David told us of everything at Upton ; then of what Mr. St. George said of Erle's letter, and of other things ; but not one word of Hope ; and even Winnie asked no question of her, because she was so full of Erle's letter, over which we all laughed merrily—and yet two hearts were sorely aching !

David was late in joining us in the drawing-room, and I did not look up as he came in.

'May I have one story before I go, Day ?' Winnie pleaded.

'What about ?' He asked it wearily, still avoiding my eyes as he sat down and leaned forward on his seat. Seeing his weary look, I sent Winnie to bed at once ; and then, when we were alone, I sat down upon the floor at his feet and cried bitterly ; I could not help it, childish as it was. I had borne the suspense so long, and I think it is harder to bear for others than for oneself. He stroked my hair with something of Erle's old tender touch.

'Effie, little mother, I could bear it better if you did not mind.'

At the sound of the gentle, pitiful words, my sobs overpowered me.

'David, David, is it sorrow for you ?'

'I think so, Effie ; but I will not tell you quite yet. You look so sorry for me.'

'Perhaps it will never be, Day.'

'Yes, I know it is coming, Effie. I know the happiness is not for me. I will try to bear it as a man. Do not make me weak.'

The sad, far-away look in his eyes almost frightened me, and I thought perhaps it would be best to lead him to talk of it, so I asked, hesitatingly, and he told me, little by little, of how he had spoken to Hope, and how she had answered him, gently and kindly, but in a way that left him, he said, in utter despair.

'It would have ended for ever, I think,' he said, 'but that Mr. St. George came in so suddenly. I wish it had ; I would have buried these wasted years and gone out to Erle.'

'And did she say—did she tell you why, Day ?'

'No, she heard me patiently, and, it seemed, sadly ; and said she had never thought that—that I loved her so ; that we were too like brother and sister, and that she loved me too well to give me, in return for mine, any but a perfect and entire love—as she could not. I asked her if she would let me try to win it, and she begged me not. And I asked her if there were anyone—oh, you know—and she said, with her clear eyes looking full into mine, "There is no man in England, David, whom I love better, except my father." I moved towards her in my passionate eagerness, and was beginning a last appeal, when Mr. St. George came in ; but she had motioned me away, Effie. I must learn to see my future now without her, but it is very dark.'

‘And, David, you must try again. That is due to yourself and Hope.’

I did not feel at all comfortable as to the truth or wisdom of that speech, but I felt that this must not rest there. I could not see my bright boy's life grow dark, and no effort be made.

That very night I wrote to Erle. Perhaps I felt that a talk with him would comfort me ; perhaps I felt too restless to sleep or read ; perhaps I felt some vague hope that that was the best step to take. At any rate, I wrote, and though I did not tell him all, and tried that my letter should not pain him, I told him of what had passed. It seemed so natural for us to tell each other everything.

Then the days went on, and the year was drawing to a close. Though David tried to be his own bright self among us, even Winifred noticed the change in him. He had lost his keen sense of enjoyment, and we seldom heard the light ring of his laughter. So we waited, and it was with a sad and heavy heart that I stood with David at the open hall door—following our old custom—while the distant bells pealed in the Christmas morning, and the singers sang the old, old story.

‘There is the star, David, waiting, as it waited over Bethlehem, to lead to God.’

‘Yes ; but, Effie, if He whose birthday we are keeping, looks down upon the earth where He has lived, He must feel saddened, even there ; and yet He came to give us life,’ David added, as if to himself. I turned to him with a yearning in my heart.

‘A new, abundant life, David ; a new, abundant life.’ He bent and kissed me tenderly, but his face was so sad that a few words came into my heart, almost as a rebuke. ‘And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.’ We were not doing so, as we closed the door, with the Christmas in our home.

‘Winnie, what a good thing the Christmas-morning service is ! I feel a perfect longing for it to-day.’

‘It always makes the day feel better and brighter, doesn't it, Day ?’ she asked, with childish earnestness.

‘Yes.’

It did, and we came home with a new brightness round us, like a glory from the grand old Christmas message.

‘Effie, here is the Oakley carriage.’

David heard, and I saw his heightened colour as he moved to meet the St. Georges. They came, they said, to fetch us all, as well as to bring their Christmas greeting, and, though they gave it lightly and lovingly, I noticed Hope's face was very pale, and her eyes restless.

‘I will leave Hope,’ Mr. St. George said at last, ‘while I go on and leave her presents with the Rectory children. Winnie, will you come and see them ?’

Winnie went gladly, and we three were left, as we so often used to be, as we so seldom were now. The carriage had hardly driven off, when Hope sat down before me on a low seat, which was turned away from David, and took a letter from her pocket. Her voice was very calm, very quiet.

‘I had a letter from Erle this morning, and he enclosed this for you, Effie,’ she said.

Now this was such an odd thing for Erle to do, that I looked up with a quick surprise, which Hope must have misinterpreted, for the crimson flushed to her face in a moment. Without glancing at David, I laughed a little forced laugh. ‘I trust yours is longer than this, Hope;’ but I held it as if it were very precious to me all the same.

I saw a sharp look of pain pass over her face, but it was hidden from David, and her voice was unchanged.

‘I will tell you mine, first, please. I think he writes to me because he knows he tells something that will make you sorry and he thinks it will be better told by me, because, he says, you are fond of me, and—’ she made a little pause, and seemed to draw in her breath before she went on—‘he has decided not to come home any more. He loves that country better than his own. He has quite decided not to return; he is very happy there, he says, and he has formed a tie so close and loving in that new land, that his life can no more be—lonely. He says he leaves his sisters with one who can well take his place, and he trusts to me to tell them, because he always felt—as if—I were his sister. I ought to have told you differently, but I—could not. That is all.’

David had risen, and had come round where he could see her face.

He asked one breathless, wondering question—‘Did Erle write this?’—and when she nodded, and made as if she would pass her letter to him, he turned away.

I felt as if in a dream when I opened mine. There were only three lines (except the words of love at the end) and they were these:

‘Dear little Effie,—Hope will bring you this, and will tell you of my resolution. I have my own home now, and cannot leave it. God bless you all!’

Holding the letter tightly in my hand, I left the room. I did not mind what Hope thought, for surely she would know what this was to me, and I must be alone. I do not know how the time passed. When Winnie came at last to tell me the carriage was waiting, I went down calmly.

When Mr. St. George spoke so easily and naturally of Erle’s decision, of his attachment to foreign lands, and of his finding a wife there, the dreamy unreality of our misery melted away, and I began to wonder and doubt, with a strange mixture of happiness and pain.

The evening was pleasant, if not very cheerful, and when at last we found the snow was falling heavily, we were persuaded to remain until next day. Winnie, tired out, was glad to go to bed at once, and I was relieved, for I felt that our home would seem dreary to us all on that Christmas night.

'Effie,' said Hope, rather suddenly, 'papa cannot spend his Christmas without music.'

I could not understand Hope that night. She was so pale until she spoke, and then she flushed so suddenly; nor had I ever seen until then the little soft hands trembling and uncertain. She looked withal so beautiful that when she began to play I glanced involuntarily across at David, standing on the other side of her, but he was looking only at the music. Then we sang 'For unto us a Child is born,' we three, missing the voice that used to help. After that we sang Pergolesi's 'Glory to God in the highest.' Then Hope, looking up at David, said, with strange thoughtfulness, 'Go and sit down, please, both of you, while I sing alone.'

'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'

Sometimes, even now, I hear the clear notes ringing in my heart, with their beautiful, triumphant words! I did not look up until she had finished, then I saw that David had covered his eyes. Mr. St. George left the room after that; but Hope, scarcely seeming to remember us, turned the pages of the book before her, and sang, 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.' Then she came from the piano.

'David,' she said, stopping beside him, with a gentle touch upon the hand that hid his face, 'does my singing make you sad? Can I sing anything that will cheer you?'

'You can do it, Hope, with a few words and no music.'

And she said, with a little smile, 'Then it is easily done, David.'

He was looking at her in such wonder and bewilderment, that she moved away towards me.

'Effie, let us go to bed. This Christmas day is gone for ever. As papa would say, it is to-morrow morning already.'

It was only a few days after that, that David coming in from Upton, and meeting me alone, drew me to him, with a dancing light in his eyes.

'Effie, little mother, kiss me in my happiness.'

'Then it is so, Day?'

'Yes, it is so—thank God.'

Erle's home and mine! Far away stretch the rich and boundless pastures of this New World; near me, at the open glass door, looking out upon them, Erle is resting. The old look of pain is not so often on his face as it was when I came out to him seven years ago, and I do not feel afraid, even when he tells

me that he feels the resting-time to be near. I never cease to be grateful that I came, for he says I have made this look like the happy old home where we grew up together—as we are together now.

We talk for hours of the old times, but rarely speak of that night when he read David's secret ; and never of that letter he wrote to Hope. There was the gladsome music of childish voices in *their* home, before they heard that Erle's friend had been a feeble old gentleman, to whom he gave a home through the last years of life. I only learned it when I joined him here, and looking into each other's eyes, we felt there need be no further parting till the last one came. So we are together, here in our fair Australian home. We have cheering, loving news of our dear ones across the sea, and my life is full of happiness ; yet I often sadly feel how powerless I am to reach the depth and earnestness of Erle's.

## ALPHONZO'S GHOST.

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I HAD spent an exceptional day. Not only was it an unusual thing for me to visit Littleborough in the race-week, but it was a most unusual thing indeed for me to venture upon a bet. Yet on this day I had left the course thirty pounds richer than I had reached it.

How I was led to bet so wisely I cannot make quite clear to myself even now. Certainly I was far from making it clear to myself on that evening when I left the race-course, possessing the thirty pounds in crisp bank-notes, as well as the pleasing consciousness that the means had at last been miraculously given me for cultivating my one marked and peculiar talent. Hitherto, though Nature had moulded me an author, there had ever stood in my way a too practical parent, bent upon a cramped and commercial career for his only son. Now my future was changed. Thirty pounds would lay the foundation of literary fame, by affording me leisure to complete my unfinished work—a novel in serial form, which would open to the world a new field of literature, lifelike, yet imaginative, and destined equally to charm and astonish. I had long known that fame and fortune awaited me on its appearance, and now I was sure of its appearance. I rapturously tapped the well-filled pocket-book in my breast-pocket, and entered the 'Saracen's Head' with feet that trod on air.

I had heard that all the inns in the town were full, so had but a faint hope of obtaining pleasant accommodation. A pallid waiter, who evidently regarded the races as a personal injury to himself, shook his head over my modest demand, but slowly and despondently at last offered me a bed-room which opened from the yard, and was built over the coach-house, the only unengaged room on the premises. It did not much signify to me, I said, where I slept, as I should leave in the morning at eight, also—though I did not add this—as I should have my thirty pounds with me.

I dined in the coffee-room—solitary in a crowd, as literary men always are—and then I prepared to enjoy myself in my own fashion, being in no haste to retire to the chamber over the coach-house.

It is consoling to feel after a hearty dinner that the pleasant recess of 'sitting awhile' is a duty imposed upon all well-thinking minds by ancient proverbial lore. I sat a while, constructing, in my mental solitude, the next chapter of my great serial, and calculating how soon it could now appear in that popular magazine whose editor would be keen enough to recognise the sterling merits of the work. I mused pleasantly upon the title—*Alphonzo's Two Brides*; or, *Which is the Nearer and Which is the Dearer*? What could sound more striking?

Let me see. The end of the sixty-ninth chapter left Alphonzo leaning against the blue velvet curtains in Gwendoline's boudoir, his arms folded, his dark, unfathomable eyes fixed on the carpet, his smooth high brow drawn by the inward conflict which wrung his deep and ardent soul.

How was the seventieth—one of the most thrilling chapters of the work—to begin?

'As Alphonzo stood thus, his heart beating loudly in the silence, the door softly opened, and Gwendoline, pale, and trembling in every limb, advanced towards him; her massive golden hair——' No! 'The masses of her golden hair falling upon her shoulders, her tiny hands clasped, the indescribable blue of her eyes clouded fitfully like an April sky.

"Alas! Alphonzo," she cried, sinking to the floor ere he could support her, "she is here! Hide me! Conceal yourself! Ah, my Alphonzo, let us be prepared!"

'She saw not how his lips had blanched, she saw not how his firm knees tottered, she only felt with a delirious joy, even in this terrible moment, that the being she idolized could stand erect, and clasp her securely to his fastly-beating heart, as he would only hold his bride.

"Alphonzo! Alas! My beloved, which is to conquer—she or I?"

'As this cry was wrung from Gwendoline's over-burdened heart, the door was once more opened noiselessly behind its velvet hangings, and a fair young figure glided——' Here I hesitated, having met with one of those difficulties with which authors have so perpetually to contend in the solitude of their own brain.

Should Gwendoline or Alphonzo be the first to start back astonished? Such trifles as these—of which the reading public guess nothing—cost us incredible anxiety; and this question might have puzzled me for hours, had I not been disturbed at that moment by the coffee-room door being opened—not noiselessly, and not behind its velvet hangings—to admit a gentle-

man whom I recognised as one who had that morning taken a friendly interest in me, and in my success upon the turf.

'Dinner in my own sitting-room,' he said to the pale waiter as he passed him; and then he fell into a lounging attitude, which was exactly the attitude Alphonzo was to assume just before those crushing tidings burst upon him in the eighty-third chapter, and blight his life in a moment. Altogether this stranger was a good deal like Alphonzo, only without his utterably expressive smile.

'How confoundedly full every corner is to-night!' he remarked to me, without lowering his voice.

I liked that. There was a dauntlessness about it which again resembled Alphonzo; a dauntlessness which I could ably pour-tray in my hero, though in my own person it often forsook me in the presence of strangers.

'So full,' I answered, in a friendly tone, 'that I cannot obtain a respectable bed-room, and am to be stowed away in some hole over the coach-house.'

'Surely no,' said Alphonzo's ghost, with thoughtful sympathy. 'You do not consent to that, of course. I always secure my rooms beforehand.'

I told him my coming had been uncertain, and explained why. 'In that case,' he said, for the first time looking into my face, 'you had better share my room for an hour or two. Come.'

So Alphonzo and I went upstairs together to a small sitting-room, where a cheerful fire was burning.

'No dinner ready!' he exclaimed, giving the bell a sharp and sudden pull, and, when the pallid waiter appeared, he looked him over coolly. I believe some great man observes that a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind; certainly I felt just then kindly disposed towards the pallid waiter, who must surely have been trembling under the keen and satirical scrutiny of Alphonzo's ghost. 'Are you feeling well?'

The waiter glanced at me, probably for an idea; but, though I had several at the time, I had no means of communicating them to him.

'Because,' continued Alphonzo's ghost, 'as soon as you are able to undergo the fatigue of bringing my dinner, I can eat it. And—stay a moment, haste and excitement don't agree with you—send the chambermaid here, if she too is feeling pretty well.'

Without turning his head, as we stood at the fire, Alphonzo spoke to the girl when she entered.

'What was that commotion between you and a lady in the hall? I heard it as I came in, a few minutes ago? Did she not say her carriage had broken down by the way? What was it? Some tale of distress. What did she want, poor thing?'

'Want, sir!' echoed the girl, a little angrily. 'She wan te



some one to take care of her, I should think. A pretty young married lady to come along like this, and then to cry because we hadn't beds as she required !'

I could not help wondering how many beds she required, coming alone, but I did not interfere—I never do.

'I tell you what, Mary,' said Alphonzo's ghost still without turning, but with that benignant light in his dark, deep eyes which peculiarly belonged to Alphonzo himself ; 'let her have my room, if she likes. I do not care about it ; I want nothing to-night easier than this arm-chair. Never mind thanks. Go off and shut out that draught.'

We were alone, and I looked admiringly on Alphonzo's ghost. Alphonzo himself, in such a situation, would have acted precisely so. I felt my heart stirred within me, and with warm affection I entreated him to share my humble apartment.

'Thanks,' he returned with an easy politeness which I sought to emulate ; 'but I couldn't sleep there if I tried. There's a legend attached to that room—very much attached to it, as that pretty little chambermaid would tell you. Fact is, a murder was once committed there, which has made the room a spot avoided. It is rarely occupied, however full the house may be.'

'Who was murdered ?' I inquired, thinking that the particulars of a startling crime might be of service to me in the concluding chapters of *Alphonzo's Two Brides*.

'Well, I do not care about making your hair stand on end, my dear fellow,' said my companion, with a friendliness which charmed me, 'but the victim of the murder was a gentleman sleeping there alone ; and the murderer, or rather murderess, still haunts the room, in the form of a female in a long dark robe, and with a profusion of black hair hanging about her. The belief here is that she is not supernatural, but a lunatic, who is kept in confinement, but makes her escape sometimes in the night. They say that if this unfortunate fellow whom she murdered had had the presence of mind to lie still, and make no sound, she would not have hurt him. She has never hurt anyone since. She only enters the room without a sound, and looks who may be sleeping there—sometimes moving the pillows a little, sometimes only examining the clothes that lie about the room—but doing no harm, if she is not interfered with. Hope you will remember this, if she visit you. Lie quite still, and you will save your life. But, for myself, I am not cool enough to venture. I wish I had your presence of mind.'

I was so pleased with Alphonzo's discernment, that after he had dined and drawn his chair up to the fire, I congratulated him on the noble renunciation of his room.

'Oh, nonsense !' he laughed. 'I shall do famously here.

There is no soporific like an easy conscience, backed by an easy-chair. Even our worthy monarch, Henry—I forget what figure, but the one whose head lay so uneasy when he wore his crown—would have slept under the circumstances. Now what will you have?’

First impulses are generally a mistake. My first impulse was to decline to be convivial, but I restrained myself with a ready tact which I believe belongs to me. I made a choice, and took it, and enjoyed it. Alphonzo's ghost enjoyed it too, I presume, for he looked beamingly upon me when I happened to catch his eye.

‘Now, old fellow,’ he said, sociably, as we grew nearer and nearer to each other's heart, ‘propose a few good toasts.’

I did not immediately reply, for, although I find it comparatively easy to make Alphonzo speak keenly and directly to the purpose on the instant—as it appears when read—a telling answer is not *always* forthcoming from me in my private character, and I have even occasionally undergone the mortification of finding a well-prepared repartee too late to be of any service. But at last, looking on Alphonzo's radiant countenance, and tenderly feeling my bulging pocket-book, I opened my heart, and proposed, ‘Alphonzo's Two Brides.’

There was a pleasant gleam of sympathy in the eyes of Alphonzo's ghost, and he drank the toast with earnestness, before he made any inquiries. Every moment my love for him increased, and I told him that he reminded me of a dear friend whom he would some day know. I knew that that would stimulate him, and it did. He asked me question after question, while my heart warmed towards him more and more, until at last I repeated chapter after chapter of my first great serial. His eyes shone, and his interest grew and grew, until I could see that anxiety about the fate of my two heroines had become even painful to him in its intensity.

As the hours passed on, a thin cloud occasionally came between us—practically of course, I mean. Sitting as we were upon such friendly terms, it baffled me extremely to guess why Alphonzo's ghost should look at me from a realm of mist. And was he really haunted, or did my own eyes mock me? There he lay idly in the great arm-chair opposite me, and close to that was another great arm-chair, and he lay idly in that too! I felt I could not solve it, if I tried, and I was much too comfortable to care to try. I stretched out my feet in lazy enjoyment. I was rather proud of my legs; I had ever looked upon them as Nature's greatest triumph, and had moulded Alphonzo's on their model; but, though highly prized, I had never longed for more. I had never wished—with that intensity which, they tell us, brings us the fulfilment of our desires—that I might look some day, and find them doubled. Yet here they were, four of them; all handsome,

all my own ! I looked again at Alphonzo's ghost, and was delighted to see that Nature had equally gifted him. I told him we must ever be dear brothers, and he seemed to think that a beautiful idea.

The night wore on so very pleasantly, that I took no heed at all of time, and cannot tell when it was that arm-in-arm (truly like the brothers we were henceforth to be) we went upstairs together to the haunted room ; Alphonzo anxiously reminding me that I had promised him a copy of my work when it was published.

I bade Alphonzo's ghost a regretful farewell, wondering why he had allowed me to support him here on my fraternal arm, when he had had no intention of staying ; put my pocket-book carefully under my pillow, and laid my teeming brain upon it.

I fell asleep almost immediately, for I had spent a profitable day. But, long before I had desired to do so, I awoke—feeling very strange indeed.

There was a faint odd light about the room. At first I fancied I must have left a candle burning behind the curtains—which were drawn on both sides of the great four-post bed, but left open at the foot—but presently the consciousness dawned on me that this pale bluish light was supernatural ; and I lay trembling in every limb, as I recalled the story I had heard the night before. I lay listening, motionless, almost breathless ; for now, close to the head of my bed, behind the curtain, I could distinguish a faint, rustling sound. I was sure I felt a movement under my head, and I lay still as the dead, remembering that Alphonzo's ghost had told me that was the only way to save my life.

Now the sound was growing fainter, and I knew the ghostly object must be moving slowly to the foot of the bed. I knew what I should see presently in the dim light there. Yes, there it came—the figure of a woman, whose long dark garments trailed on the ground, and made that rustling sound which had been the first evidence of her presence—a vision with a white, fixed face, ghastly with a deathly, bluish whiteness ; half covered by the long masses of black hair which hung about it. Creeping close to the wall, in the scanty light, this supernatural figure passed before me, and my pulses stopped their beating, and my very breath ceased.

Bending a little with one white hand against the wall, and with glazed, wide eyes fixed in a visionary gaze, this figure crept on, until it glided behind the heavy curtains again, and I could neither see nor hear it any more. I dared not move my eyes from that lighted spot again, for I fully expected to hear the ghostly sound once more. So I lay utterly still, listening with painful, strained intensity, every other sensation lost to me.

Ah ! a sound at last—nearer and nearer, louder and louder, close to me !

‘Your water, sir. Seven o’clock.’

I raised myself in bed, and wildly glared around me. The room was dark now ; of course the ghostly light had disappeared with the gliding step. But why had I not noticed this at the time ? I rose and lighted my candle, still trembling in every limb.

On a chair behind the curtains stood an exhausted night-light ; but as I examined it I discovered a faint chemical smell, and then I knew that Mr. Child had never conceived a night-light such as this. I dressed slowly, not only utterly bewildered, but also feeling, like that uncommercial traveller who had ‘a mislaid headache somewhere in his stomach.’ So odd indeed were my sensations, that I actually forgot to look for my pocket-book until I was ready to go downstairs. Then, in a vague panic, I went up to the bed and moved my pillows.

It was not there. My valued pocket-book—my poor, dear mother’s last gift but one—my thirty pounds, my private memoranda, my notes for the conclusion of *Alphonzo’s Two Brides* !—all had vanished, and with them my claim upon future fame and wealth ! I could not believe my own eyes. I unmade the bed, searching closely, as if I had been searching for a mosquito. But it was of no avail ; no pocket-book was there.

I went downstairs, hoping that the history of that previous night might all prove to have been a ghostly dream. I entered the sitting-room, where Alphonzo’s ghost and I had spent some dimly-remembered evening which seemed a good way off, and I expected to find him there ; but the room was empty. There was no Alphonzo. There was even no memento of his having been there at all, except a very suggestive fragrance. I rang the bell, then questioned the chilly waiter with heat enough to do him good.

‘That gentleman ? Oh, I remember, sir. He left about two hours ago, he and the lady who came in just before him last night. Found they were going on by the same train, so had a cab between ’em, and started soon after five.’

‘But I thought the lady had a carriage with her ?’

‘Never heard of it, sir. No sign of it here. They went off together in the cab. Were a married pair, I believe.’

‘And she had a quantity of long dark hair ?’

‘Might have been her own, or mightn’t. There was a great deal of it bunched up about her head.’

I have never seen either of these two ghosts since—neither Alphonzo’s nor the one which haunted my room that night—but I have my own private ideas with regard to their relation-

ship to each other. And these ideas I must beg leave to retain.

I left the 'Saracen's Head' without even mentioning my loss ; for such an uncomfortable blush visited my cheeks, when the waiter alluded to the previous evening, that I immediately drifted into another subject, and made my retreat as soon as I conveniently could.

Certainly I had promised to send Alphonzo's ghost a copy of *Alphonzo's Two Brides* when it came out, and I have ever been accustomed to keep my word ; but I cannot do so in this case. Not only because Alphonzo's ghost did not think it advisable—under the circumstances—to leave me his address ; but also because the manuscript has not yet been appreciated by any one of the editors to whom I have—for many years—been submitting it.

## AFTER THE LESSONS.

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FRIDAY ! It was always so pleasant to wake to the conviction that another Friday had come round ; the best and happiest day to me of all the busy six. Not that the work was easier—quite the contrary—but the lessons were not wearisome. Before twelve o'clock I looked on to the happy hour that was coming then, and after twelve the glamour of that happy hour was upon me. Perhaps, independent of that one hour, mine was a hard, dull life—teaching, late and early, and with no prospect of a rest. Mine were no guinea music lessons, given at my own residence or within a short drive, but whole days spent in railway journeying, and walking, and sitting beside the same piano in a ladies' school.

My mother and sister, in their little country cottage, lived simply and quietly ; and I, in my necessary town rooms, left many a longing unsatisfied and many a wish ungratified ; but withal it was only by constant work that we could live, and there were many terms when constant work was not forthcoming. Sometimes, when a discontented feeling arose that nothing could surely be harder than to try—as I so often had to do—to teach a hopeless child who had no note of music in her nature, I would remember bitterly that I knew one thing harder still, and that was having no one to teach. But this was Friday, and I would be happy—wild and hopeless as it was—for this one day.

I brushed the thick dark curls that nobody cared for, without trying to hide the grey airs that nobody grieved to see ; and I walked down the quiet streets to Miss Berry's. When I entered the music-room, the mild little German governess was sitting in her apparently normal position, and tatting as only necessity or indolence can tat. I knew she was there to chaperon my pupils, in her silent and serene manner ; but I did not object ; why should I ? At twelve o'clock I talked freely and listened willingly ; and though she might watch and listen too, in her unoffending way, nobody else cared ; so why should I ?

Twelve o'clock struck, and with a glad heart I dismissed the only real musician among all Miss Berry's *cheres élèves*, and strolled across to speak to the little Fraulein. Nobody should see that I was nervous when the door opened, as it did after some minutes. She came in, a tall, slender girl of seventeen, with a rich, bright, brunette complexion, large, dark, liquid eyes, and a bewitching smile, for ever hiding or disclosing the gleaming little teeth. She advanced and held out her hand to me. Of all my pupils at Miss Berry's, she was the only one who greeted me so. A bow was all I generally gave or received; but Marie Souvé, the highest, the proudest, the most hard to manage, always met me with a frank greeting, which in itself, in spite of all after-conduct, acknowledged our equality and friendship.

'You have kept me waiting, mademoiselle, as usual; why do you always do so?'

'Only ten minutes, monsieur; I thought all musicians required an interval of ten minutes between the parts.'

'But I have spoken so often of this,' I urged. 'What were you doing to-day?'

'I was getting my music, and—I took three or four bars' rest, that was all.'

'Please don't let me have a repetition of it,' I said, overdoing as usual my effort at stern and masterly indifference. 'Are you ready now and—musical?'

'Most musical,' she replied; 'but, unfortunately, most melancholy, too.'

'That is unusual, surely. Your life seems generally bright enough.'

'My life, monsieur, hitherto has flowed on smoothly as——'

'As your music,' I suggested; for, if my favourite had one failing, it was a perfect inability to play any one piece through smoothly and correctly.

'As my music; yes,' she answered, gravely; 'but now I have come to an accidental, and I don't know what to say to it.'

'Say nothing. Play it, and pass on.'

'But, unfortunately, it obliges me to pass on to—another piano, and to—lose my master.'

I looked straight into her eyes, for it was not always that I knew whether she were in jest or earnest.

'Papa has come for me,' she went on; 'and I am really going home to France to-morrow.'

'Going home?'

'Yes; don't girls generally go home when they leave school?'

'But this is sudden.'

'Oh no, only a week or two before my time,' she said. 'I was to leave at midsummer, you know.'

Know! how was I to know? She told me nothing in earnest,

nothing that she meant. I knew my face was pale, and that she was looking at me,

‘Will you begin to play, if you please, Miss Souvé?’ I said.

‘I must give little Fräulein a kiss first. She is quite sorry to lose me; and indeed even I myself wish I were not going *quite* so soon.

I was grateful to her for turning away, and for dallying so long, and I tried not to feel hurt that she took her seat with the old, merry, defiant face.

The lesson was given and received in silence. I marked the fingering, and tapped impatiently at the wrong notes—they seemed to come even oftener than ever—but I could not talk, try as I would. This was the last time I might sit beside her, might speak to her as I loved to do, with a friend’s ease and a master’s privilege. Henceforth her life would be far apart from mine—she, with her wealth and beauty; I, with my work and cares—and our two paths would never cross again. I thought all this, with a sinking heart, through that last lesson; then the clock struck, and I started.

‘You may go, mademoiselle.’

She rose, collected her music, then stood with the portfolio under her arm.

‘I have not enjoyed this last lesson, monsieur.’

She hardly ever called me anything but ‘monsieur;’ yet, unnatural as it was to my English ears, there was music to me in her pretty, piquant way of saying it.

‘Nor have I.’

‘Then why did you make it so unpleasant?’

‘I did not intend to—when you came in.’

‘You never even said you were sorry I am going, monsieur. Anyone else would have said so—in courtesy.’

‘I cannot say things in courtesy.’

‘I suppose not; at any rate, you never try,’ she answered, and her eyes danced with fun. ‘I am much more gracious. I tell you I shall be *very* sorry to leave you. I hate bidding good-bye, and no one will ever nip me half so readily as you, Mr. Rikhart; no one will scold me half so energetically as you. What shall I do?’

‘Perhaps you will not need it then.’

‘But to you that makes no difference. I have been gentle and obedient to-day, I’m sure; yet you frown upon me now. Do you like France, monsieur?’

She rested her music on the back of a chair, leaning upon it, and turned to me with the question, suddenly and saucily.

‘I hate it!’

‘Do you?’ she said. ‘For the same reason, perhaps, that Nelson did.’

‘I don’t know his reason.’



'Withdraw your opinion, expressed the other day, that I know nothing but poetry, and I will tell you.'

'Did I ever say *that*, Miss Souvé?'

'Does it not rankle within me day and night, and consume my very life? Ah, a little smile at last! Do you like smiling, monsieur?'

'Are you going to say one serious word to me to-day?' I asked. 'My time is flying.'

'Not any faster than mine. I am going to tell you—and then you can never say I gave you no instruction—that when Nelson was asked why he hated the French so bitterly, he said, "Gentlemen, my mother did." Did *your* mother hate the French?'

'Mademoiselle Souvé, you must go and send some one else to me.'

'An English girl? you hate the French ones so.'

It flashed across me for the first time what I had said to a French girl—and to the one I loved best in all the world. I draw back, half ashamed, half proud.

'Do not tempt me to retract. Though I said it blindly, I hate them only because they claim the brightness of my wretched life. You should not tempt me to hurt you.'

She threw over to the German governess a quick glance, which I did not care to follow; then, with her music in her left hand, she held out the right to me.

Fate will be sure to cross our paths again, Mr. Rikhart. Farewell until then.'

'Fate does many odd and capricious things,' I answered; 'but she is hardly likely to elevate me to the peerage, or shower gold upon my way. When she does, we may meet, Miss Souvé. Farewell until then.' I changed my tone suddenly; I felt my voice was growing tremulous. 'You will keep up your music? You will not let it all slip by—with the memory of this time?'

Her clear soft eyes looked straight into mine. 'I shall not forget my music master, nor his lessons—if I can help it.'

The last few words, added out of pure mischief, provoked me to my careless answer. 'Would you ever do anything to please anybody?'

'I never succeed, you see, monsieur. I do try.'

'Your mode of trying is peculiar, mademoiselle.'

'Mr. Rikhart, you must be really very glad my lessons are over. You always said I was your slowest pupil. I hope a better one will take my place.'

'That no one ever will or can.'

The words were uttered thoughtlessly. Had I considered for a moment, they would not have been spoken.

'Your time is up, Miss Souvé; good-bye. I know it would be useless, else I would ask you to remember as much as you can of what I have taught you—with care and difficulty.'

She made me a naïve little curtsy, and the corners of her mouth were puckered with an amused smile.

‘You pay me compliments at parting, monsieur.’

‘You will have praise enough from others, presently.’

‘Shall I?’ she questioned, soberly. ‘That sounds encouraging, more so than your usual pieces of intelligence.’

‘You know,’ I went on, for I could not help it, ‘that you have treated both my orders and my wishes with invariable disregard since the very first day I saw you.’

‘And how did I treat them before that? Oh, your face is growing savage, monsieur! True musicians never feel in the slightest degree moved from the lofty indifference belonging to genius, by school-girls’ jokes. Now will you listen while I tell you one thing before I go?—and I am going in a moment.’

‘Well?’

‘I’m glad all’s “well” with thee, for it encourages me to continue my reply. As to remembering your scoldings, and lectures, and raps upon the piano, and your continual contradictions, I think I *shall*, for a long time to come. As for remembering your directions and advice regarding studies and scales, why—to describe it with moderation and in my native tongue, “Je voudrais si je coudrais, mais je ne cannaïs pas;” and, with a toss of her dainty little head, she left me.

There were other lessons to be given, others to whom all my attention must be devoted, and I must not think, or my heart would break. Never again! that was the burden of my thoughts and heart-beats. Never again! and the day’s work went on, and the quietness of night seemed never coming. To those who do not know the pain of being left to the dull, unchanging routine of a life from which the light has been taken, it would seem impossible to describe it; to those who do, what need to try?

Four years went by, bringing changes in other homes, but none in mine. The work went on year after year; and, because I had no end to work for, the increase of fame and prosperity mattered little to me.

Four years had passed since I had lost my favourite pupil, and no one had taken her place. The bright, winning face lived with me in my dreams, hopelessly far away in the present, but with the old pleasant reality in the past; and mine was a quiet, busy, dreamy life, with but little of the hope and ambition of other men’s.

It was a dark and wet November night; my day’s teaching was over, and I sat lingering over my solitary dinner, with a book beside me—I had little time for reading, except during my meals and late at night—when the servant entered with a note, sealed with a crest almost as large as itself. I opened it carelessly—I had so many to open in the course of every day—and glanced at

the signature. Then my eyes seemed to burn as I eagerly read the words.

‘DEAR SIR,

‘My grandfather, Sir Robert Winter, with whom I am now staying, is giving a private concert here to-morrow, and the conductor he had invited has been taken seriously ill. They were in great distress about it when I arrived yesterday, and the thought struck me that you might be induced to undertake the arduous task of correcting and directing amateurs. The notice is very short, but I don’t think my old master will require more. If you will oblige us, may I ask you to return in the carriage to the rehearsal to-night ?

‘I am, dear Sir, yours,

‘MARIE SOUVÉ.’

If I would go ! What was the short notice to me ! It was best, for I could hardly have borne a long one. The old name was unchanged. It was only when I saw it so, that I knew how deeply hope was buried in my old dream.

My voice would not sound cool and indifferent, when I send down word I would be ready in ten minutes, and my hand shook as I folded the little note, and put it carefully away. Then, leaving my half-eaten dinner, I went to dress. My best dress-suit would do for the rehearsal, and I could have a new one in time for the concert. Ah me, how merrily I tried to make it clear to myself that I had intended before in a few days to order one.

I own that I stood rather long before the glass that night, and wondered whether any other man so young had such a careworn face, and so much grey among his hair ? But the thought came hastily, ‘no one will notice.’

The carriage took me rapidly to Lancaster Gate, and I was ushered at once into a long, handsome music-room, at one end of which stood a piano, two harps, and various other instruments. There was a group about the fire at that end, ladies in gay evening dresses, and gentlemen in costumes which I thought made mine look rather acquainted with wear. From the group, an old lady at once advanced to me.

‘Mr. Rikhart,’ she said, ‘I feel that you have favoured us indeed by coming on so short a notice. I could not have asked it of a stranger, as you are to me in all but name—with that of course I am familiar.’ She meant in my capacity of musician : fool to let my heart beat so at any other thought !—‘But Made-moiselle Souvé assured me you would unhesitatingly say *No* if you feared your reputation suffering through our stupidity.’

‘I willingly risk my slight reputation, my lady,’ I answered, bowing in acknowledgment of her gracious little speech ; ‘and,

whether it is likely to suffer or not, I will tell you after the practice.'

I had looked in vain among the faces for one I should have known so soon. It was not there.

'Now, if you please,' continued Lady Winter, 'we will try the overture.'

I tried not to watch the door; nor to look and long for anyone to come, and I think I succeeded. I grew anxious over the music as usual; my whole heart seemed in it; and I lost myself in my intense desire for its perfection and success, until at last the practice was over, and I stood talking of the programme.

'If you will allow me,' I said, 'I will add to the 'cello part in the selection from "*Guillaume Tell*." Will you try it over in the morning, Lord Hume?'

'With pleasure, but how shall I get it in time?'

'I will write it now,' I said, 'and give it to you. Then is the programme complete?'

I tried to ask it carelessly, and I looked into the fire, for fear my eyes should tell their anxiety.

'I think so,' replied Lady Winter, 'unless Mademoiselle Souvé consents to sing—as we wish.'

In the old times she had not been allowed to learn singing, though I knew what her voice would be from the way she spoke and laughed. And so some one else had taught her, and she of course repaid those lessons as she never would repay mine!

'Is she unwilling?' I asked, still without looking up.

'She said she would try a song over to-night,' was the reply; 'but now she declines to come in at all. Mr. Rikhart, you will sit in my morning-room to write that music, and I will send refreshments there, as you will not come in to tea.'

I would not wonder on Marie's absence. I would write the part. What else had I to do in that house?

I did not often sit down to arrange music in a dress-suit. That might have been the reason I was so long, and the notes seemed so difficult to harmonise. It did not signify, for I was alone, and kept no one waiting. I daresay they thought I was gone, if they thought of me at all. I sipped my wine often, otherwise I left the tray undisturbed. I was nearing the end of my task, when I heard, through the half-open door, a merry voice, apparently on the stairs, a little way below the door, raised as if addressing some one above.

'Marie. You are going down at last, are you? Why did you never come to see our new conductor?—your own importation, too!—and why didn't you tell us what to expect? Why, there won't be a more perfect gentleman in all the room to-morrow.'

A voice answered, that sent the warm blood thrilling through my veins:

‘Did you expect a savage?’

‘But, when we asked you, you said he was just like all other musicians.’

‘And was I wrong?’

‘He is uncommonly unlike the master of *my* experience, at any rate. Did *you* like him, Marie?’

‘If you know me at all, you know how much liking I should spend on anything connected with music lessons.’

Like a coward, I bent over the writing that was already finished, with eyes that saw nothing. I do not know how long it was before Lord Hume came in for the music; then I dismissed the cab that had been called for me, and walked home in the dreary, dark November night.

That same suit would do very well. Who would notice whether it was old or new? I dressed with lingering, listless fingers, and wished the cab had taken me more slowly. On arriving, I went at once into the concert-room, which was empty, but arranged and lighted for the performance. I had promised to be thus early, and I began to look over the music. There was to be a supper after the concert, so I presumed the guests were taking tea now. I had sat down idly at the piano, and begun to play—sadly perhaps to my thoughts—when I heard a light, rustling step, and I looked up. The old days, the happy Fridays, came crowding back; and drowning all the years of hopelessness; when I saw the bright changing face, the tender, laughing mouth, and beautiful eyes. I felt for an instant as if she had come in for her lesson, and that it was natural to see her so. After that first moment I felt the difference, and rose with a pain I could not suppress. She was as far from me as if those Fridays had never been, yet she came up to me with the frankly outstretched hand just as of old.

‘Monsieur, I am glad to see you at your old post.’

I must meet her with all the self-possession I could muster.

‘But you would rather not be at *yours*, mademoiselle.’

‘No, thank you,’ she answered; ‘yet I am sent in now for almost the same purpose. Would you hear me try this song? It is in the programme as sung by me, and I am afraid of your angry ejaculations breaking forth in public if I make a failure of it, and you are unprepared.’

The old, wilful manner and ready smile!

‘Have I authority, then, to correct where I wish?’

‘A polite inquirer would have said “*if* I wish.” But of course you have. I would not sing it to you on any other terms. Spare me all you can.’

She stood half behind me as I played, and then began, in a rich contralto voice, sweet and pure, but that was all. At the end of the first verse I turned.

'Stand here please, Miss Souvé, and try to sing with more effect. Don't be afraid of seeming affected.'

'I am not afraid of *seeming* anything,' she answered, with her old impatience.

'Then, for the time, *be* affected,' I said, stern once more in my fear of myself.

'If you continue to speak to me so gently and forbearingly I shall indeed be affected—even to tears.'

Her piquant little face was indescribable in its gravity as she said this.

'Now try.'

'What, standing here!' she cried. 'Must I look at you all the time?'

'As you like, mademoiselle; but I wish to look at *you*.'

'Is that how you judge if the notes are right? Is that what Alfred the Great means when he says, "Things seen are mightier than things heard"?''

'You have not forgotten your Tennyson, then, Miss Souvé, if you have forgotten all else.'

'I have not forgotten my "everlasting quotations,"' she answered, lightly; '*nor* who once applied that complimentary term to them.'

'Who did?'

'Never mind; but it was *not* the elegant little Italian master, who taught me this song—with such infinite patience and infinite success.'

'An excellent musician, probably,' I said, rather unintelligibly, though scarcely successful here.'

'Oh! indeed he was,' said Marie, demurely. 'I'm sure if Amphion really "left a small plantation wherever he sat down and sung,"—which wouldn't have been called grammar at Miss Berry's—Signor Malfi must have left quite an extensive forest; though he generally stood up to sing—being of the small, smallest.'

'As he is not here to give a finishing touch to his triumphant achievement, will you sing it to an inferior being?' I asked, without a smile.

'Yes. "At a pinch, Lord Ballyraggan is better than no lord at all." Tell me when to begin.'

We got through another verse, then stopped again.

'Mademoiselle Souvé, try to sing as you would tell this fact to—to anyone. Don't sing so gladly of a very melancholy feeling.'

'I cannot sing to *you*,' she said, throwing down the music with a rather nervous laugh; 'you are so strict and particular, monsieur. I daresay I shall do it respectably when the time comes, if I have forgotten your innovation on the good little signor's style. Why have you not grown more lenient and charitable in all these long years?'

'Why should I? What has there been to make me so? If the years are long to you, and such as you, what have they been to me?'

'Perhaps leap-years. Have you been teaching ever since?'

'How otherwise could I have lived?'

'Who learns at twelve on a Friday now?'

'I forget.'

'Oh, monsieur, what a fib!' exclaimed Marie; 'and how savagely you said it! I would not be that unoffending player for—all your talent.'

'Which you value so highly, mademoiselle.'

'Not too highly,' she said, with all her dimples visible; 'it would be sinful, and might cast unpleasant reflections on my own unfortunate deficiency. I am very happy without the power, Mr. Rikhart.'

'You of course have everything you could wish, mademoiselle.'

'Except your one power of giving others such a true pleasure. What is it about "Noble music with a golden ending"?''

'And *that* you do not care for?'

'Hush, monsieur! Not in myself, I said; but—it is such a happy world, should I not be happy in it?'

'And should not I, mademoiselle?'

'Of course; but you will not be so, and I will.'

'Perhaps the two things are incompatible.'

I said it unthinkingly, bending over the music; but, if she understood me, she did not heed, and answered even more lightly than she had spoken yet.

'If I do not meet with the applause I merit to-night, I shall consider it entirely owing to my accompanist. It is not to be expected that *anyone* can play that extraordinary accompaniment without trying it through first.'

'Sing with as much expression as possible, mademoiselle, and trust to me for the rest.'

'How shall I trust you? "Not at all, or all in all"?''

Her heedless words pierced me strangely. I turned upon her with a great passion in my face.

'It is not very probable you will do either, Miss Souvé.'

'Shall I not? Why?'

'You are too far from me—in spite of my madness—to trust me in all. You are too near me—in spite of your rank and beauty—to trust me in *nothing*.'

'Monsieur Rikhart,' said Marie, folding her white arms on the flutist's desk, and looking gravely down upon her jewels, 'I think we shall all go astray to-night, unless you conduct by proxy, because you don't seem to care how you conduct—yourself. Do remember we are all at your mercy.'

She did not look up, but I saw the irrepressible smile playing

on her lips. Carelessly turning to the fire, I tried to answer with a steady voice,

‘If you *were* at my mercy, our disputes would soon end.’

‘You would use your power mercifully then?’

‘I would, for I would give it back to you.’

At this moment a door at the further end of the room opened, and a gentleman sauntered up to us. Marie, only half rising from the desk, languidly turned her head.

‘Enter the ‘cello just in time to rescue the contralto.’

‘All unworthy such a task,’ Lord Hume said. ‘What is the enemy?’

‘My unfortunate song.’

‘Mr. Rikhart,’ he said, ‘if you have been able to find a fault in Miss Souvé’s singing, you are the greatest discoverer of the age. May I congratulate you on that honour?’

‘Not until I make the discovery public, my lord.’

‘Lord Hume, do *you* approve of the whole programme being in one sharp?’ asked Marie.

He looked astonished, as he well might.

‘It is rather late to transpose, is it not, mademoiselle?’

‘Ordinary minds would think so,’ she said, her eyes full of laughter; ‘but Mr. Rikhart could transpose, oh, a lifelong opera, in a few minutes. He has done it.’

Lord Hume laughed, though I am sure he could not have told at what, and began flattering Marie in that light manner that sits so gracefully on some men, but which made me feel inexpressibly heavy-hearted. But the performers were gathering now, and it was time to begin. I was the conductor, heart and head once more in the performance, and nothing more, until Marie’s song came; then, try as I would, I could not look professionally indifferent.

She stood up, and there was a brief, hearty applause; only, I think, because she looked so beautiful, with an attempt at seriousness on the merry face. I think she must have thought of what I had told her, after all, for there was genuine expression in every verse of her song, and I was not surprised (though so glad) when it was called for again. She gave me a quick, amused glance as I began, and I felt, as usual, defeated by her.

After her song, she joined the audience, and the programme went on with undeniable success. I would not stay, though Lady Winter and Sir Robert, with many thanks and pleasant words of satisfaction, begged me to do so. I had work awaiting me at home, I told them, and I did not care to add that I could not bear the pain it caused me to see Marie as I saw her then, surrounded by handsome, flippant men, and gay and merry herself among them. So I declined, and walked out into the hall, just as the company entered the supper-room. While a servant called a cab, I waited there.



‘Why did you not say good night to me, monsieur?’

Marie was beside me again, the lamplight falling full upon her bright flushed face and beautiful hair. There was a delicate white rose in her hair, and I remember looking at that only, as she stood there, while I felt how far apart we should be in a few minutes.

‘Would they have made way for me, do you think, mademoiselle?’

‘You used to do that for yourself.’

‘I am older now, Miss Souvé, and—not so expectant.’

‘I am sorry,’ she said. ‘Hope is a good companion for us all. How did I sing my song?’

‘Better; you were more attentive to my instruction than in the old time.’

‘Now this is extraordinary!’ she answered, with a laugh. ‘I expected you to be filled with remorse for having judged unfairly of my singing, and ready with abject apologies; and here you are attributing my success to a few angry words of your own.’

‘You seem to be appreciating your success.’

‘I am revelling in the voice of public applause, monsieur. Do you think there will be anything in the newspapers about a certain talented young Frenchwoman? Don’t you *hate* the French?’

‘You are very happy to-night, mademoiselle,’ I said, wearily, ‘and very indifferent to *my* feeling for your Fatherland.’

‘The world is my fatherland, monsieur,’ she said, with her saucy smile; ‘and it was made for me to enjoy.’

‘Perhaps,’ said I, as the cab drove up to the door, ‘for me too; and, if that is harder to me for your sake, it is my own fault.’

As I went down the steps I could hear that some one had sought and claimed her, and her soft rich voice was lost to me as I drove away in the darkness.

Christmas came, and I spent two days at home—as I always called my mother’s cottage. Then the old life went on, with its daily work. I rose higher and higher in my profession, and I took my first voluntary rest—surely a painful one for the first—in order to be with my mother in her last illness. Then my sister came to me, and brightened my lonely rooms until another summer had passed, and her soldier-cousin won her from me. I watched the vessel out of sight, bearing away the only one who loved me; and turned away with a bitter thought in my heart, ‘Why do I work and work? For whom? Who cares for my success, or for my failure? Who will be glad if I am famous? I will leave the wearisome race, for the loneliness is too unbearable.’

Even as I cried, God, in just punishment for my rebellion, took the power from me, and answered in His own time to my thankless question. For seven weeks from that day I lay in my lonely

room, ill and helpless. They said that I had taken serious cold on that hasty night journey from Liverpool; but, when I look back upon those troubled hours, I think I see a plainer cause for the dreary pain that followed. There were violets and snowdrops in my room when at last I crawled down, trying to be grateful for the feeling of returning life. Day by day I came down and sat at my window, too ill to read — thinking of hopeless, far-away things, in spite of my kind physician's warnings.

One day when I sat thus, with my back to the door, looking out over the glistening rows of tiles to the spring sky beyond, my servant quietly announced 'Miss Souvé.'

I fancied it one of the oft-recurring hallucinations of my illness, and I did not turn. But the soft, rustling step became a reality; and my only feeling was that I *dare* not show the paleness of my face. The trailing dress swept by me, and, some one, passing me, turned to look into my eyes. Ah, yes, the bright youthful face still, yet saddened by something more than the sombre mourning bonnet.

'Invalids, I know, have a horror of bonnets,' Marie said; 'so, if you please, I will dispense with mine while I stay.'

The childish, unaffected greeting, the old frank shake of the hand, put me at my ease a little; though now the red had flushed in my cheeks.

'You are less handsome than you were, monsieur.'

If she had been tender and pitying in her first words, I should have broken down in those few moments; but when she came to me as the dear pupil of six years ago, with the old pretty, wilful ways, I met her on her own ground, and felt my strength come back in her presence. The look of sorrow that crossed her changing face was sympathy enough for me, and did not unman me as words would have done.

'You are less handsome than you were, monsieur.'

'Yes, mademoiselle; that was the first thing I discovered when I began to think about myself again.'

'And what was the second?'

'That I was changed in nothing else.'

'And so you *have* begun to think about yourself again. Is there anyone else to do it also?'

'Several kind friends come to see me, and I am well taken care of—too well, I have sometimes thought.'

'But you do not think so now?'

'No, not now.'

'Ah! your smile makes you look young again.'

'But, take away the smile, and I am an old man, mademoiselle.'

'I should grow very wan and haggard with a two months' illness, and bear it very badly too,' she said, touching her smooth cheek with her little white hand. 'Bodily suffering pulls one down more quickly than mental, does it not?'

'Do you know anything of either?'

'More than you think, monsieur. More than you shall ever know.'

'It is very hard to believe this, Miss Souvé; you have always seemed so gay and radiant.'

'Don't say *seemed*, please, as if I hid a breaking heart behind a laughing face,' she answered hastily; 'I never did that, believe me; I always had hope; and, as you say, hope agrees with me—Why do you look so comical?'

'I was only wondering how you managed to make her agree with you.'

'Because I am provoking? Thank you, monsieur!—complimentary as usual.'

'Miss Souvé, tell me how to do it,' I said, 'how to make my life pleasant and bright like your own.'

Gently turning aside my question, she touched her black dress.

'My life,' she said, 'has had a shadow since I saw you. My father's death was a sore trial, monsieur.'

'Your father!'

'Yes, he died a few months after that concert. You remember?'

I did not interrupt her to say whether I remembered.

'That is why I am in England again.'

'I am very, very sorry to hear this,' I said. 'Did it break up your home, mademoiselle?'

'Entirely. The property was all entailed, and of course my step-brother took possession. I did not love his chosen wife; so, when he married and brought her home, I came away. My sunny France knows me no more, monsieur.'

'And—where—'

'Where am I living?' she interrupted. 'With old friends at present—this is not long ago, you know—very happily; more happily than most penniless girls.'

'Oh, mademoiselle, that is not true!'

'That I am penniless? Indeed it is.'

'I cannot—realise this.'

'Is it so hard?'

My heart was beating with a wild joy which I could scarcely hide.

'Sir Robert Winter is very kind to me,' she continued; 'though he is only my step-mother's father—my grandfather once removed, as I call him—and I shall be very sorry to leave him.'

'And you leave him—when?'

'Oh, I don't stop to think. Why should I distress myself by fears for the future? Time enough when it comes.'

'They used to call you the heiress at Miss Berry's.'

'Did they?' she laughed. 'Ah! there is no dependence to be placed on human prospects, is there? But I always thought I *was* an heiress, and yet at this moment I am indeed utterly penniless—No, not that; I have a few small coins. "How is the mighty Roman empire fallen!" I daresay you will contradict me if I say I do not care; but I do not.'

I had risen, and was leaning against the window, looking down upon her. At last I spoke.

'In a few minutes,' I said, 'when you have left me, and my room is dark and cheerless again, I will for ever put my dreams away, out of sight, for all the years to come. But now, Marie, while you are here beside me, I must speak at last. Scorn me as you will, but I must speak. For so many years have I loved you with a deep, undying love; for so many years have I loved you in spite of sense and reason; for so many lonely years have I loved you as a man can never love but once; for so many long and hopeless years have I loved you only, as I must love you still through all the years to come; that—it has overcome me at last, strong as I thought myself. Marie, look up and stop me, for I dare not tell you all the strength and passion of my love, though the thought that you are lonely, too, has drawn it from me. Pity me! dearest and best in all the world; look up and tell me you forgive me.'

But her head only drooped lower and lower, while I told her of my hopeless love, until at last she covered her face with her hands, and remained so, minute after minute,—so pitiful, I thought, to see my useless earnestness.

'Marie,' I said, very slowly, 'each word was drawn from me in very pain, do not speak if you would rather not. I understand, and will not vex you more. The love I give to you cannot be thrown away, and I am only sorry to have pained you by telling you of it. I do not fear the life before me, though spent alone. Dear Marie, many men have suffered more than I. Do not grieve for me. I am ready to bear this as a man should. I can stand my own, but not *your* sorrow, dearest.'

She was crying with low, stifled sobs, and I felt as if my heart would break to see her pitying me so.

'Miss Souvé, I said, in an unnatural voice, 'there is a carriage stopping at the door. Is it for you? Shall I send word you are ready?'

I left the room to prevent the servant coming in, and crept in again slowly—wondering vaguely whether I were *really* growing strong and well, as I had thought; Marie had not stirred, and I stood beside her, and gently laid my hand on hers; then she looked up, her eyes soft and bright through her tears.

'You wish me to go?'

'Would I willingly shut out the sunshine, Marie? Only in the darkness grief is easier to bear.'

'One question, monsieur : would you have told me this, had I been rich ?'

'Never.'

'Why ? Would it not have been true then ?'

'Poverty is proud—and hopeless.'

'I am not proud—nor hopeless,' she said ; 'so of course I am not poor. How could I be, dear monsieur, when you have given me such a wealth of love ? How can I give *you* wealth for poverty ?'

She had risen now and stood before me, so winning in her shy and gentle earnestness.

'Will the same gift satisfy you ?' she said ; 'the same love from me ?'

I dared not answer, for I dared not believe. I only gazed into her eyes as I waited.

'If so,' she said, 'you have it all ; you have had it all for a long, long time.'

'Oh, Marie !'

It was all I could say, as I held her to me, in a long and close embrace that gave me strength and hope and courage for a life to come. 'God sent you to me on this day, my love, and Him I thank.'

Our silence was broken presently by the impatient stamping of the horses below.

'Why don't you remind me that the carriage is waiting ?' said Marie, starting. 'I had forgotten. I have been here a long time, and you have asked me nothing.'

'Nothing, Marie ?'

'No—nothing practical and sensible.'

'I will now. How did you know I was ill ?'

'By the announcement made at St. James's Hall, when you were too ill to play, as advertised.'

'When shall I see you again, my dearest.'

'That is not practical, so I need not answer.'

'May I call upon Sir Robert ?'

'Yes. Good-bye.'

My first drive was to Lancaster Gate, and I was ushered into the very room where I had written in my loneliness, on that night which seemed so long ago. I told my story frankly and humbly to Sir Robert Winter. He heard me patiently, and then shook me by the hand.

'I have perfect faith in Marie's judgment and taste,' he said, 'and am confident of her happiness and your own.' Then, after a little further conversation, he asked me a question, rather suddenly, 'You know of course that Mademoiselle Souvè will be very rich ?'

'I know *how* rich she will be ?' I smiled. 'She told me that her father had left her penniless.'

‘So he did, of course,’ replied Sir Robert, laughing. ‘Everybody knew he would. She never was her father’s heiress, but mine. Did she not tell you this?’

My heart sank indeed when I told him she had not.

‘The little actress,’ he said. ‘Still it is but right that you should know; not, I’m sure, that either of you will wish to hasten the time of her inheritance. I will call her.’

He was kind to leave me then. My brain was throbbing, and I had not realised my position when Marie came gently up to me.

Oh, Marie,’ I whispered, ‘you should have told me this. I dared not have——’

‘You dared not have taken my love, for fear that you should have had to take my great expectations too,’ she said; ‘then let them both go.’

‘Hush! This is cruel.’

‘No,’ said Marie, ‘*you* are cruel to say I ought to be content with wealth, and leave the love for others.’

‘Dearest, I think I shall wake presently to find all this a dream.’

‘Wake to your old hatred of the French, monsieur.’

‘Hard words were my only safeguard, Marie. You shall hear no more, so long as we are spared to each other.’

I whispered the words in my deep thankfulness; but she answered quickly, ‘Never mind promising me that. With all this new happiness, I cannot afford to lose my dear old master—dear, *even then*, monsieur.’

‘Is he so very old?’

‘I will confess you looked about eighty-two when I came to see you.’

‘And now?’

She looked up at me quizzically.

‘Well, not so ancient now; but they were all wrong here when, after that rehearsal, they told me that you were very——’

I laughed myself, as I silenced her laughing lips, for I knew she did not care that they were wrong.

## KENNETH

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THERE was a mirror over the chimney-piece ; so, while Kenneth spoke, he could make his words all the prouder by casual glances at the face and figure which the glass gave back. It was a face no man would blush to meet, but it told so readily the inner thought, that Kenneth Goring ought to have felt some shame in meeting it with the look of scorn and contempt it wore then.

‘What on earth is your reason for wanting me to go, mother?’ asked he, throwing an open letter on the table, and turning to a bright little elderly lady, who was busily sorting papers at her desk.

‘You know my reasons, Kenneth,’ she answered, without stopping in her employment, ‘just as well as I know them myself. I shall not repeat them.’

‘By the powers, you are hot and proud about it!’

‘Hot and proud, do you say?’

‘Indeed I do. Why won’t you listen to a fellow quietly?’

‘Speak to me quietly, and I will listen with pleasure, Kenneth.’

‘Then once more, what are your reasons for wishing me to go?’

‘My brother has asked you many times, and it is unkind and unreasonable to go on refusing as you do—too proud even to disguise your reason.’

‘I’ll bear the blame of the unreasonableness, sooner than undergo the visit. If he had remained as he was, I would have gone as I used to go, willingly enough; but when he made such a fool of himself, and married that languid, bad-tempered beauty, I made a resolution to keep a county between us henceforth.’

‘Perhaps, when you know her, Ken, she——’

‘I never will know her.’

'Her daughter may be a nice girl, and you are nearly cousins, you know.'

'Not very nearly, I think,' said Kenneth, with an ominous curve in the thick moustache, 'and never can be nearer, that's a blessing. Of course she is her mother over again—girls always are.'

'Boys are not,' rejoined Mrs. Goring, with a twinkle in her eyes. 'Well, I shall not answer the letter until to-morrow. Bring your answer home from mess.'

'I have given it you a hundred times, mother. What an obstinate little woman you are!'

As Kenneth left the room Mrs. Goring's face took its usual happy expression, and she put the letter that had caused this argument, into her desk, murmuring to herself, with an irrepressible little smile, 'What trouble I should have with him if he were really as obstinate as he thinks he is! But he has held out a dreadfully long time about going to Erstone.'

Mrs. Goring was quite right in the cogitation which called up that smile, for at night, when Kenneth came in from mess and found her awaiting him, he said, as he bent to kiss her—

'I'll go, mother, if you like. My leave begins on Thursday, and I may as well go. You seem bent upon it this time, I wish it were over.'

There had been a fair at Colebridge on that Thursday morning, and as Goring walked down the station platform, he noticed that a great many people were crowding into his train; not that they would interfere with him, he thought, as they made lively assaults on the third-class carriages, a set of boisterous roughs, with whips in their hands and a general odour of the stable about them.

There was always a good deal of curiosity about Kenneth Goring. High as he held his head, the blue eyes missed very little of what was going on below them; and now they were almost unconsciously busy with these drovers, as they eagerly crowded into the close, dusty, third-class carriages.

'I've put your portmanteau into the van, sir, and the gun and fishing-basket,' said his servant. 'The smoking compartment is empty, sir, and the train doesn't stop before Liston Junction.'

'All right. You may go, Barry.'

'Train's just about to start, sir.'

'I know.'

But Kenneth still stood, for he had caught sight of a young woman, lame and sickly, hurrying towards the third-class carriages, and towards the farmer's men, who were still laughing and talking inside the open doors, and still coming up, more straggling now, and forcing themselves in. A porter, seeing the girl was lame, went before her, and opened a second-class carriage. She drew back timidly, showing him the ticket in her hand; so



he shut the door, and moved to another carriage. 'All right,' Kenneth heard him say; 'plenty of room here. Move up.'

But the men inside, to whom these last two words were addressed, shuffled together, and declared there was no room at all, while the woman shrank back to the porter's side. Just then a man at the back of the carriage—Kenneth had drawn nearer, and could see it all distinctly now—leaned forward, and said, in a tone far more repellent than the rude ones had been, 'Let her come in; she's my pretty Jane. We want her here to amuse us.'

'Get in, miss,' said the porter, hurriedly; 'no time.'

No time! Kenneth stood between the woman and the grinning men, and taking from her trembling hand her green ticket, and giving into it his white one, spoke a few words to the porter. 'Your carriage is higher up,' he said aloud to the woman as he sprang in among the rabble. 'You have but a second to do it in.' Before they were off, Kenneth had caught the pleading bewildered look of thanks.

A mile or two out of the station, when they seemed to have recovered their breath, the men began making merry at Kenneth's expense. He maintained a careless silence, until one young wag, with grimy hands, began feeling him, being oppressed with doubts as to whether he was real. Then Kenneth turned on him a pair of cool, inquiring eyes.

'Are you poor tramping fellows wanting an odd job in the haymaking, if you can get it; or are you Irish vagabonds?'

'Neether, any more nor ye are yerself,' was the reply. 'We're honest English labourers.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Kenneth. 'What a mistake we make, then, in being proud of our English labourers. I've heard them called a set of capital, manly fellows, but I now see that is a lie.'

Though Kenneth had not expected any result from this cool opinion, he saw a gradual one; and when the train stopped, and he could change his place, he gave his companions an amused nod that brought a laugh to several faces. He was led to an empty carriage, and shut in, the look of amusement still lingering on his face as he thought of the first stage.

'Erstone!'

Waking from a long reverie, Kenneth emerged languidly, not at all rejoicing that so much of his journey was accomplished. As he walked away, the lame girl came slowly from her carriage; but Kenneth had forgotten all about her before he had mounted the dog-cart which awaited him outside.

'You take the reins, sir, I suppose,' said the groom.

'Yes,' said Kenneth; and they drove on until they turned in at his uncle's gates.

'Beautiful park, sir!' observed Sam, astonished to find they

had been silent so long. 'Good thing there's a son, sir, to inherit it all.'

'Oh, there's always a son in these cases,' answered Kenneth, carelessly.

'Rather hard for Miss Ardale, though, sir, being only a step-daughter of the master's, sir.'

'Then what should she expect?'

'Oh, she don't expect anything, sir,' answered Sam, quickly.

'I know she don't; but I shou'd think it's 'ard being a step-daughter where there's a deal of money in the family.'

'I should think it would be harder where there's none,' said Kenneth, in a tone that showed such entire indifference to the subject, that Sam could bear to waste no more of his intelligence; and they drew up to the house in silence. A handsome grey stone house it was, all its low windows standing open in the pleasant summer evening, and terrace grounds spreading down to a magnificent park, through which the river—the famous fishing river in which lay Kenneth's one hope of amusement—wound among the trees.

'Kenneth, my dear boy, are you here at last, are you?' said his uncle. 'Take the luggage down carefully, Sam.'

'Yes, uncle, I am here at last,' said Kenneth, shaking hands cordially with a small elderly gentleman.

'I'm very glad you are. Maria, I want you, my dear'—as a lady in evening dress, holding a shawl round her shoulders came down the stairs—'this is my nephew, Captain Kenneth Goring; your nephew, too, now.'

Kenneth bowed coldly, for this was the *bête noire* of Erstone,—the 'languid, bad-tempered beauty.' And she looked the character too; her mouth and eyebrows both painfully arched, cold and sinister despite her beauty, and beautiful despite her peevish languor. For ten years the opinion Kenneth formed of her at that moment never changed; but, when the wavering health failed altogether, Kenneth never uttered that opinion more.

Half an hour afterwards the young man entered the drawing-room, looking strikingly big and handsome as he stood beside the little master of the house.

'Why do we wait?' drawled Mrs. Beresford, from her cushions. 'Ring for dinner, Edward; it is half an hour late as it is'—which implied rebuke did not interfere with Kenneth's composure in the least.

'I thought you were waiting for Marion, my dear,' replied Mr. Beresford, ringing as he spoke; 'it is so very unpleasant to go in to dinner in relays.'

'I was not aware that Marion arranged the meal hours,' said the mistress of the house, taking the arm Kenneth offered. This cold but perfect politeness he maintained through all their

intercourse, unmoved by any and every provocation. As they crossed the hall, he was aware that a young lady ran downstairs, and, hastily linking her arm in his uncle's, followed them into the dining-room, where the plate and glass in rich abundance shone and glittered in the evening sunshine. 'My daughter, Miss Ardale, Kenneth; my nephew, Captain Goring, Marion, my dear.' Kenneth's inquisitive blue eyes took her in at a glance—as he told his mother next day in a letter of five lines. She was rather tall and pretty; proud and satirical; with an intensely repellent manner—that was all. Certainly it was enough, he said.

Miss Ardale bowed to him, and took her place, giving him no second glance.

'Where did you go to make you so late, my dear?' asked her stepfather.

'Different places,' she answered, carelessly, and set the seal to Kenneth's unflattering opinion of her.

She was not even pretty enough to excuse this evident pride, he said, glancing at her once more. No, certainly not. She had not a perfect feature in her face. A pair of big brown eyes, and a bright complexion; he did not see anything else to admire. Yes, her teeth were good, just the teeth and complexion that belong to perfect health—nothing more. But Kenneth, as he followed his uncle into the drawing-room after their wine, said to himself, 'I must be polite to her while I am here; perhaps she is lonely, being the only young person about, and the parent being such a shrew.' So he advanced to Miss Ardale and sat beside her, and made small talk—the small talk which he had always found irresistible hitherto—but she did not attempt to hide the fact that she was bored excessively, and of course that was no stimulant to his exertion.

'May I hope for a little music to-night?' he asked, really longing for a relief.

'If you like,' she answered, tapping her foot on her stool, and leaning back in her low chair.

'Thank you.'

There was a long pause, and then, as she did not attempt to move, Kenneth bent and offered her his arm.

'For what?' she asked, looking up with lazy surprise.

'To lead you to the piano,' said Kenneth, flushing awkwardly, and feeling painfully tall as she kept him standing so.

'Thank you, but I am very comfortable here.'

'But you promised me some music,' he went on, looking at her, with an unwonted anger growing in his eyes.

'Not at all; you asked me if you might hope, and of course I have no objection to your hoping. Why should I have?'

'Then you will not play or sing?' asked Kenneth, still standing, and the anger darkening his blue eyes now.

‘Neither,’ she answered, curtly, the small foot suddenly ceasing its tapping.

‘Thank you for showing me so soon your unwillingness to oblige. It will prevent a repetition of the request,’ said Kenneth; and, turning on his heel, he missed the careless little bow with which she acknowledged his speech.

So it went on, day after day, just the same. Kenneth’s attentions were met so invariably by a repulse, that they died a natural death at last; and, except for a very uncertain politeness when she came in his way, he was apparently oblivious of her. Yet he caught himself wondering a great deal about her. Why was it that she so persistently refused to ride with him in the morning, when, as he knew, she was very fond of riding? Why did she purposely remain invisible until luncheon-time, after which she knew very well that she was required to read novels to her mother?

How dull and stupid it was here, except for the fishing! and how disagreeably selfish of Marion not to try to amuse him!

On the very last morning of his stay, when Kenneth sauntered out, with his fishing-rod on his shoulder, he came upon Marion leaning against a pillar on the terrace, in a braided morning-dress and a rather shabby hat.

‘Are you going to take pity on me to-day, Miss Ardale, and show me a new spot to try?’ said Kenneth, doffing his straw hat as he stood beside her.

‘The benefit of a new spot to you would hardly recompense the trouble to me,’ she answered, without turning to him.

‘True, it would not; I forgot myself for a moment,’ he answered, hastily. ‘I will find a new spot for myself, this last day. Good morning, Miss Ardale.’

She returned his good morning slowly, but she watched him out of sight among the trees before she stirred.

Even Izaak Walton would have caught nothing, fishing as Kenneth fished that morning; and when, in his restlessness, he had wandered from point to point of the river, still unsuccessful, and wasted hours, he began to wonder when he should get back again, tired and dispirited as he felt.

‘There must be a cut,’ he said, looking round. ‘It would be ridiculous to follow the river back in all its twists.’ So he turned directly off, and came presently into a wood. ‘I’ll go straight through, turning neither way,’ he thought; ‘that’s always safest in a strange wood.’ With which logic he quickened his pace, coming out at last in the open meadows, and close beside a very small white cottage. ‘I may just as well inquire here for the nearest way home, as go wandering for hours with this basket on my back.’

Thinking this, he bent his tall, curly head, and entered a

small empty kitchen, neither dirty nor untidy, but evidently untouched that day.

Kenneth looked round, wondering whether it would be worth while staying until some one appeared. He did not know much about country cottages, so he made up his mind that, as the door had been ajar, somebody was about ; and, as his eyes wandered round, they rested with intense surprise on a pair of little boots that stood beside the small bright fire. They looked so unsuited to the place, so incongruous, that perhaps that was the only reason he stared at them so hard. And, as he stared, his ear caught a low voice through another open door beside him. The voice came from above, and sounded strangely sweet in this odd little room. Kenneth listened, astonished. 'Now I am going down, Mary, and when the kitchen is ready I will fetch you.' This he heard the voice say ; then he felt that the owner of the voice was coming downstairs. His eyes were on the narrow wooden steps ; and first he saw a broom, and then a pair of shoes—a loose, ugly pair of soft, noiseless slippers—and then a spotless petticoat ; and then, looped high upon it, a braided dress he had seen before. Then he saw Marion's face, and yet not Marion's face as he had ever yet seen it. He stood staring, as if some power had rooted him motionless to the spot.

She blushed painfully when she saw him, but she was the first to recover herself, while he gazed on, his eyes unconsciously telling something more than their surprise.

With her sleeves tucked up above the white, dimpled elbows, she folded her hands on the broom, and stood looking at him defiantly.

'Captain Goring, you had no business to come spying here. You should not have come,' she went on, determined that her eyes should not droop as she stood in her odd position. 'If I choose to give way to a whim, and come to see how poor people live, you have no right to follow me.'

'I follow you !' he repeated, bewildered.

'Yes ; was it generous, do you think ?'

With all her trying, she could not prevent the tears gathering slowly in her eyes.

'Miss Ardale, indeed, let me assure you,' began Kenneth, earnestly, 'that I entered this cottage simply to ask my way, and had no more idea of seeing you here, than—'

'Than the man in the moon : ' she filled in his pause, laughing lightly. 'I see it was so, Captain Goring ;' and involuntarily she held out her hand, drawing it in again suddenly, with another laugh. 'I would not recommend you to touch that,' she said, shaking her head ; 'it wants an application of soap.'

'But I would like to touch it,' said Kenneth, quietly.

'No, I should be ashamed of the contrast.'

'Then there shall be none,' said Kenneth, his face full of fun.

'Please to give me the broom ; my own hands will be worse in a minute.'

'Do you really mean to stay here?'

'I do, indeed, as a volunteer.'

'And do you wish to help me?' she continued, seeing that he spoke in thorough earnestness.

'Indeed I do.'

'Well, then, let us work in concert. Please to move a few things for me, while I sweep the kitchen.'

First he moved the little boots gently on to the window-sill, while Marion watched him amused.

'They make such a noise, those high heels,' she said, in explanation, 'and invalids' ears are so delicate. That reminds me—I wonder who Mary thinks I have got down here helping me. That is famous, Captain Goring ; I am never able to lift that.'

'You have often done this work, then?' said Kenneth, turning a little from his occupation to look at her in a new, grave way.

'You have, I should say,' she answered, flushing a little : 'you do it most scientifically.'

'Now the broom,' said Kenneth, with a steady, business-like air.

'No, that is my part.'

'Miss Ardale, you are most unfair, keeping my weapon in custody under folded hands.' And, as he took it from her, he closed his hand for a moment on hers.

'It might be too black to venture presently,' he explained.

It roused her from her silent enjoyment of his novel occupation. She busied herself, too, and soon the little kitchen was a picture of neatness and cleanliness.

'Now, Captain Goring, please put that queer old easy-chair here at the open window, and wait a moment.'

In her slippers, she ran upstairs without a sound, re-appearing very slowly, supporting a tottering old woman, whom she placed snugly on the easy-chair, where the pure summer breeze could kiss the worn, withered cheek.

At a look from Marion, Captain Goring began to talk to this old woman (naturally and gently, as the poor like to be talked to) sitting on the window-sill, and not seeming to know very well what to do with his long legs, while Marion brought out a teacup and a saucer, bread and butter, and arranged them on a little table beside her. Then, as she moved to the fire with the teapot, Kenneth darted forward. The two faces were ludicrously grave and immovable as they bent over the little black teapot, necessarily rather close together, as Marion held it, and Kenneth poured the water into it. What a stern need there, was for neither of the four eyes to stray !

'Now, Mary, you are comfortable, and have everything to your hand,' said Marion. 'Oh, where is my memory to-day? I have never cut the bread and butter.'

While Kenneth watched the pretty hands—which had been washed, of course, after the sweeping process—he wondered whether they could be the useless hands that fidgeted so often at night in the drawing-room at home. She cut half a dozen delicate slices, putting the plate within reach of the feeble fingers; then she turned, slipped on her boots and the old hat, consigned the slippers to a cupboard, and asked Kenneth if he were ready.

He was so astonished at the unusual prospect of the walk with her, that he almost sprang over the little table.

'I have forgotten my hands, Miss Ardale; I will go and wash them outside.'

When he came in, wiping them cheerfully on his snowy handkerchief, he caught the low thanks and blessings of the poor woman, uttered while Marion opened the worn old Bible, and placed it on the table.

They went out together in the sunshine, which, for the first time to-day, shone pleasantly for Kenneth Goring. He did not look in Marion's face, as they walked side by side; he hesitated to break the silence, for fear she should have slipped back into the Miss Ardale of the day before. But at last she was so still herself, that he took courage to speak.

'Does she live alone, that poor old woman?'

'Yes; except that a girl, who passes here from her work, goes in and puts all right for the night.'

'And are you accustomed to do this for her in the mornings?'

asked Kenneth, gently.

'I do not know how many times it takes to make a custom,' said Marion, with an echo of the old tone. 'I have not done it often. It is not long since her daughter died, but it is impossible to get help here.'

'Yet your serv—'

'There, don't ask me those questions, please,' she interrupted, impatiently. 'What did you catch to-day?'

'Nothing. But I do not care. I am hoping you will ride with me, or, rather, let me ride with you this afternoon?'

'No, thank you,' she answered, with frigid politeness. 'I am going to read to mamma.'

'But Mrs. Beresford drives at five.'

There was no answer to that remark, and Kenneth, hurt and humiliated, walked on without attempting again to break the silence.

At five o'clock that evening, as Mr. and Mrs. Beresford drove from the door, and Kenneth's horse stood waiting for him, Marion came slowly up to where he stood.

'I will ride with you, if you choose, Captain Goring,' she said, a little wearily.

'Thank you,' he answered, growing suddenly in Marion's eyes three inches taller, and annihilating her at once. 'I am not at all anxious to interfere with your arrangements, and have not the slightest objection to ride alone.'

Yet in less than an hour, his horse was back in the stable, and he—restless and ill at ease, yet not at all understanding why—was walking on and on towards the outskirts of the park, seeking any shade he could find. Suddenly he came out from among the trees into a field of hay partly cut, and there he saw Marion, sitting against a tree upon the mown grass, with a child beside her. Should he turn away before she saw him? Yes; clearly that was the best. And yet he did not do it! For two or three minutes he hesitated, then he advanced boldly and sat down near her; nay, not only sat, but lay there just at her feet. She saw him, for her lips quivered as he came up, but she went on with what she had been saying to the child. Then she was quite silent. The little girl had turned eagerly to Kenneth as he threw himself down.

'Are you Miss Ma-an's b'other?' she lisped, touching his thick curls with great inquisitiveness. 'Do you live wif her?'

'To-day I do, to-morrow I don't,' he answered, gravely eyeing the little inquirer.

'Nellie,' called Marion, a little impatiently, 'we must go home now.'

'In a minute, Miss Ma-an,' said the little girl, investigating with a cautious finger Kenneth's thick moustache, while he lay patiently under her examination. 'Won't Miss Ma'an let you?'

'No.'

'Don't you like her?' asked the child, after a pause.

'Why should I, if she does not like me?'

'Are you so naughty?—will she never like you?' asked Nellie, ruminating the matter.

'I hope she will some day. Ask her.'

But when the child turned, Marion took her hand and rose.

'May I come, too?' asked Kenneth, rising quickly.

'If you care for such small company,' answered Marion, her voice shaking a little. And for the second time that day they walked side by side in the sunshine.

They stopped in the village at a small dingy house with a shoemakers' sign over the door, and entered a gloomy kitchen, where a delicate, lame woman, whom Kenneth recognised, rose to meet them, evidently from a long, earnest watch beside a wooden cradle.

'Sit down, Ellen,' said Marion, gently; 'we have brought Nelly safely back. Did you take your rest?'

'Yes, Miss Marion; but Ned came home just then.'



‘Ah! and was his journey of any use?’

‘He had walked those twenty miles to-day, ma’am, and not a bit of sole hardly left to his boots. That’s forty miles in two days. And now he’s heard that a good many men are at work in the quarries up to Travean, and he thinks they’d be sure to want navvy boots; so he’s lying down a bit, and is going to start there in the morning; and, if he finds work there, he’ll send for me to do the closing, if only baby—’

Kenneth had stood in the doorway, but now, thinking some new thought, he went outside and waited, walking to and fro before the door.

Those quarries at Trevean belonged chiefly to Kenneth’s old guardian. Perhaps his influence might help any poor fellow to some work up there; at any rate, it might be tried; and, as he pondered on this, the poor young mother told Marion, with swimming eyes, that he was the gentleman who had been so kind to her on her journey. So this, perhaps, was why Marion came out to him softened and gentle.

‘Yes,’ she said, in answer to his remark that he hoped the poor fellow would succeed, ‘I hope so, too; but I had wanted—at least, his wife had wanted—him to stay at home a little now, till the baby is better, or till—I fear myself that the poor little thing is dying. She cannot leave it at all; that was why—’

‘That was why you took Nellie out to-day,’ said Kenneth, gently. ‘I see, Miss Ardale; indeed, I see a great many things; but really I have forgotten something at that cottage. Would you mind walking slowly on for a minute?’

Kenneth was anxious, he told the delighted wife when he entered the cottage, to get a pair of strong shooting-boots made for himself. ‘Could her husband be induced to undertake them before he went to the quarries, did she think?’

‘Oh, he would begin them at once.’

Kenneth measured himself, the woman standing by and showing him how, and awkward enough he was at it, but very merry, and did not seem to care to be very particular. It was not long before he hastened after Marion, whom he overtook just as she was about to turn into the woody outskirts of the park.

‘That poor little woman told me something about you, Captain Goring,’ she said, looking at him almost as if she were proud of him. ‘She told me of—a very kind act of yours.’

‘She must be a bit of a muff,’ said Kenneth, as he closed the gate behind him.

‘Captain Goring, I want to explain something to you, please.’

Marion saw he was listening with even more than courtesy, and so she did not wait for an answer.

‘I have been very unpolite and rude to you ever since you came.’

He did not attempt to contradict this; and, though she went on bravely, she winced a little.

‘What I do in—in the sort of work at which you caught me to-day, I have to do without my mother’s knowledge. She hates—she does not like having anything to do with the poor ; and I am obliged to be sly and hypocritical ; and oh, it is so difficult to do right ! Indeed, I do not know what is right—which is right to do.’

Her hands were clasped, as they hung before her, and her eyes were wide and bright, but she kept back the tears.

‘You are right,’ said Kenneth, emphatically, not knowing much about it himself, save by instinct. ‘You are decidedly right.’

‘You began to tell me to-day, at Mary’s cottage,’ she went on, humbly, ‘that I might have got help. But I could not, unless I paid for it ; and you must know—of course you have always known—that I am about as well off as the poorest among them, save in the outward adorning provided by my mother. If I had allowed you to finish your question, Captain Goring, you would have said, “Why not send a servant from home to do what I—what you and I—did this morning ?” It is simply impossible, for, if it had been discovered, she would have lost her place at once, whoever she may have been. Oh, what a thralldom it is ! But what was I going to say ? So you see now why I could not tell you where I used to go, and what I used to do.’

‘But I should have loved——’ began Kenneth, when she interrupted him hastily.

‘Well, another thing I may as well say, Captain Goring. You disliked my mother and myself ever since you first heard of us, and you made no secret of it. You would not come near us, and, when at last you did, it was only done to please your mother. I saw it first by her letter, then by your manner, and all my pride rose in rebellion. I determined that, as you were bent upon thinking contemptuously of us, you should have cause for doing so. And I have given you cause up to this very last day, have I not ? It was a piece of girlish temper, perhaps, which you cannot understand, though you have felt the consequences, and must have had a thoroughly unpleasant visit among us.’

‘Do you dislike me quite as you have seemed to do ?’ asked Kenneth, quietly.

‘No, no. Why should I dislike you ?’

‘Nor have you succeeded in your aim. I have *not* had cause to think contemptuously of you at all. I have thought——’

Suddenly in the shady, quiet wood, he took her in his arms, and kissed her. Shyly she drew away, as he whispered his loving words.

‘I have been unloved all my life,’ she faltered. ‘What is there to love in me ? Oh, Kenneth, think before you say it.’

‘I have thought and thought, and now I must say it,’ he answered, his blue eyes full of truth and earnestness. ‘I must say to my love that I love her.’

## PENNIE'S CHOICE.

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### I.

OUR morning studies were over, and I was lying down for my hour's rest before luncheon. Pennie, leaning with folded arms on the back of my sofa, was provoking Scot as industriously as she could, while he slowly closed and put away the books she had left in confusion on the table. This room, in which we studied, was no regular school-room, but the pretty morning-room, which Pennie—sole mistress and sole daughter in the house—insisted on my appropriating; and opposite me the wall was mirrored between the two low windows. In this mirror I could see just then a bright reflection of us all; and the contrast in our three faces struck me as it had never struck me before.

Pennie's came first (one must notice Pennie first, in whatever group one saw her), a piquant face; with mischievous lips, and laughing, dark blue eyes that seemed never to have known pain. Yet though no one else in all the house had seen them melt to tenderness, and the arch lips quiver with sympathy, I had, many and many a time, as my little only sister knelt beside me in my pain. Below Pennie's radiant face lay my own: thin and languid, but flushed a little just now—not from my studies, as Pennie said, but from many wide thoughts of which she was the centre. Then before my couch stood Scot Cowen (my tutor, though scarcely two years older than myself), with his pale, thoughtful face and slight, nervous figure. He was looking across me into Pennie's eyes, and telling her, in the clear earnest voice which I had learned so utterly to love and lean upon, that if she wanted her translation corrected by him she must re-write it legibly.

'I shall have to write it legibly *after* you have corrected it,

he said. 'Surely that is enough labour to bestow on the tamest bit of all the drama.'

'I cannot read it as it is,' began Scot, but corrected himself; 'at least, I will not. To-morrow, Miss Brett, you will, I think, have prepared a readable copy for me.'

Her eyes flashed upon him as he went quietly on with his work.

'Is Charlie's written carefully?'

'Yes. He gives me very little trouble, as you know.'

'I know,' she answered, touching my hand softly; 'and I give you much. But let me assure you that you give me infinitely more, Scot. If it were not that you are oddly gifted with the power of bringing dead and buried facts—or fictions—into the modern sunshine, for my small brain to grasp, I would not come and try to learn from you at all. So stiff you are, and stern, and exacting.'

Scot's lips, at that moment, were stern indeed.

'Then don't come in any more, Pennie,' suggested I, laughing a little, though I spoke in anxious earnestness.

'I must, because I must know all you know, Charlie,' she answered, stooping impetuously to kiss me—a little act of hers which always thrilled me with pain when she did it in Scot's presence.

'If you had been anxious for instruction, you would have stayed at school, I should think, Pennie.'

'Oh, ladies cannot teach,' she said, in her pretty but thoroughly dictatorial way; 'no lady ever taught me anything.'

Scot laughed quietly. 'No one can teach,' he said, 'unless the pupil will respect their teaching. I cannot teach you for that reason.'

'Why, Scot?' said Pennie, raising her eyebrows, and pursing up her red lips, 'I respect you intensely. I always feel a kind of awe overshadowing me when you are near. I should hardly dare to venture into your presence, only I *must* be as clever as Charlie; so I must be taught by Charlie's tutor.'

'Charlie's tutor is always at your service,' returned Scot, gravely; 'but, while I teach you, you must obey me. *While* I teach you—that is all I ask. When lessons are over, I claim no further authority.'

'Of course not,' laughed Pennie; 'and your claim is small. From ten to one you require authority unlimited—and, by the way, I think it is ten to one you will not have it.'

'Then I shall decline to give you another lesson at all,' rejoined Scot, quite in earnest.

'All right, Scot; only you see I have learned, among smatterings of dead languages, to know that you always say that, and always don't abide by it. You should enforce your laws, my tutor.'

Looking at Scot, and waiting for his answer, I saw his face change, while his hands were still busy, and I knew, without turning, who had opened the door behind me. Walter came up, and leaned beside Pennie, looking never once at me, giving me no handshake, no thought, until he had feasted his happy eyes on the winning face which had brightened so wonderfully at his coming. Before I turned, I glanced a moment into the mirror again, and somehow I could not help fancying that the whole picture was changed. Walter's handsome, debonair face and lounging figure had brought some new element into the scene—a quick, throbbing happiness; an idle, careless unrest.

Breaking in upon my sudden, silent thought, Scot's few quiet words had an odd effect.

'How is my mother to-day, Walter?'

'Complaining a little, as usual, old fellow; and, as usual, very unwilling for me to leave her.'

'Did she send me a message?'

'Not a bit of it. Her only parting prayer to me was not to ride Satanella.'

'And did you?' I asked, beginning to feel a little tired, and wishing they would go.

'Of course. I was in the saddle when she spoke. You will ride with me this afternoon, Pennie?'

And Pennie, who loved these rides with Walter Cowen more than anything else through all her day, nodded her yes.

'Come now for a stroll in the garden. I came early on purpose for that,' said Walter, in the loving tone of appropriation which led my sister irresistibly.

She smiled good-bye to me, and they went off together, through the low, open window; their happy voices coming back to us on the scented summer breath. Day after day Scot and I had watched them walking together; yet, though they filled our hearts, we never spoke of them when we two were left behind.

'I shall leave you now, Charlie, for your rest.'

'Where are you going?' I asked, for Scot generally sat with me reading through this hour.

'Not far, dear fellow,' he answered, settling my pillows comfortably for me. 'I shall be ready to drive you at our usual time.'

Left to myself, I tried very hard to think of nothing; and, of course, thought of many, many things; striving to put them straight and pleasant for us all, but failing in the effort, as I had failed often and often before. Then I tried to let a quiet trust creep into my heart, and still the restless anxiety which was now its constant guest.

Years ago, when Scot was only a boy—head boy in the Easterwood Grammar School, and taking all the prizes—I guessed; no, hardly guessed, I *knew*; that he loved my sister better than anyone else in the world. True, he had no very near relations

of his own to love ; but, if he had had, I fancy it would have been just the same. I was a young fourth-form boy in those days—at home on sick leave three-quarters of my time—and Pennie a wayward, mischievous little girl, attempting all my lessons, but never taking the smallest heed of her own ; yet we never fancied Scot at all superior to us, because he was himself so thoroughly unconscious of any superiority. He did not come to our house very much ; he worked too hard for that ; but his half-brother, Walter—a popular boy, who was a proverb of idleness, and did not work his way into the shell until he was leaving—came so perpetually that he grew to seem a very part of our home life. He was such a pleasant, winning lad, that his very vanity seemed excusable, his very selfishness amusing, and his love of pleasure natural and irresistible. But I think Pennie noticed none of these qualities in Walter. To her he was a handsome, daring protector and patron : a boy-lover, who took it for granted that she loved him, and won her heart in doing so. And now that Walter was a tall, handsome fellow of three-and-twenty, and Pennie, with her gleams of childishness, and fitful, authoritative humours, was nearly eighteen, this love was just the love it had been from the first : unharassed by any doubt ; undisturbed by any quarrel ; untouched by any passion : fresh, and gay, and glad, despite the deep and troubled shadow which it cast upon the lonely path that it perpetually crossed.

Walter's widowed mother lived about two miles from us, at Easter Hill, and had a very comfortable property of her own, which of course Walter would inherit, while Scot, her step-son, had only fifty pounds a year of his own. But he had talent enough ; and there was as much truth in Mrs. Cowen's indifferent opinion, 'Oh, Scot is sure to get on, penniless as he is,' as there was in the proud addition, 'Dear Walter would never have done to be poor.' I do not think Mrs. Cowen disliked Scot at all, she was only utterly indifferent about him, and neglectful of him. Her heart was so entirely filled by her own son, that she really had no room for anyone else ; not even for Pennie, though I do believe she tried to love her because Walter loved her.

When Scot left Oxford, where, with his talents and his £50 a year, he had won himself honours, he became my tutor for a time, and lived with us entirely. All my life I shall be glad and grateful for this, for he has taught me as no one else could have done ; making my studies pleasant and healthful to me, and rousing me cheerily from the languid, idle life into which, through my weakness and inactivity, I might so easily have fallen. But during all Scot's lessons I had one sore heartache, and this was through Pennie's determination to have those lessons with me ; to learn all I learnt, and for Scot to teach it her. For she would not guess what I knew so well ; she would not understand with

what a dangerous mixture of pain and pleasure, and joy and anguish, she troubled all his days. Poor Scot! It would have been difficult work to teach her (with her puzzling questions and frequent inattention) if he had not loved her; but loving her as he did, and knowing what he knew, I did not wonder at the old still look which was creeping into his young face. My own watching eyes grew dim as I read its unwhispered struggle. Still, in defiance of all my entreaties, Pennie would insist on being taught with me; mastering quickly and brilliantly what my slower nature could not grasp; entering into Scot's opinions, and reading rapidly his only half-formed thoughts; then turning round and laughing at his pedantry; flashing scornful, provoking words and glances at him, or daintily and proudly, in his very presence, parading the happy, trusting love she gave his brother.

All these things I was thinking over, as I had thought them over many and many a lonely time before, when the luncheon bell rang, and Pennie danced in, that Walter might give me an arm.

'I knew Scot was out, because I saw him plodding up Easter Hill,' she said. 'Why has he gone home?'

I told her I did not know, and she looked across at Walter, rather puzzled. Then suddenly she laughed.

'I know, Walter. He is afraid your mother may be frightening herself about Satanella, and he has gone to reassure her.'

'What nonsense!'

'Then I hope he has ridden Satanella himself,' I said. 'Not walked all that dusty, up-hill road.'

'No; he was walking,' said Pennie. 'You may depend that was the reason, as I say. It is just the sort of thing poor Scot would be likely to do.'

'Poor Scot, indeed!' echoed Walter. And I slipped my hand from his arm, and went alone into the dining-room.

Scot did not appear through the meal, but, just as Pennie had declared her unselfish determination to drive me instead of riding, he came up to us; his face very white, as it always was when he was tired or hot.

'I am glad to see you back, Scot,' said Walter, with hearty emphasis, as he ordered Pennie's horse; 'for we were nearly missing our ride. Come, Pennie, it will be doubly valuable to us now.'

'Charlie,' she whispered, an odd wistfulness in her big, bright eyes, 'you look as if you didn't want me to go. Shall I drive with you instead?'

I laughed a negative; and yet I did feel strangely unwilling for her to go, guessing that this ride would bring them nearer together than they had ever been before. We watched them off, then followed them through the open gates, Scot turning the pony the opposite way. We spoke very little to each other—we

were real friends enough to be silent together when we would—and I remember feeling oddly relieved when we reached home again, and I saw Walter lounging at the door with his cigar.

'Charlie, Charlie,' whispered Pennie, coming in to me as I rested, and putting her arms round my neck, and her eyes close to mine: 'some day I am going to—marry Walter. Are you glad? My dear, dear brother, are you glad for me—and glad for Walter—and glad for yourself?'

What could I tell her but that I was glad? How could I but be glad for her, with the dancing, loved-filled eyes so near to mine? How could I but be glad for Walter, knowing what her love made my own home? But how—well, there was enough to prevent the words being false when I told her I was glad.

'Really, Charlie?'

I kissed the quivering lips, and told her Walter would be a very happy fellow, and I should miss her sorely. The tears gathered in her loving eyes, and I think we must both have behaved very childishly for a few minutes, there alone, in the tender evening sunshine.

I begged Walter to leave early that night, for fear his mother should be nervous about the young, scarce-broken horse he had brought; but he laughingly declined. He was so happy and pleasant, though, that his refusal did not sound in the least harsh or unkind; and no one thought it so. He and Pennie were so entirely engrossed by each other that as my father was out, and Scot had left the dining-room early, I slipped away to the study. Here Scot was sitting with his book. He looked up and smiled, but I lay down without a word, and he read on. The light faded. Scot closed his book without ringing for lights, and still sat leaning back in his low chair. I heard Satanella's footsteps as she was being led down from the yard, and soon afterwards I knew Walter had gone, for Pennie opened the door softly and came up to me.

'Are you so tired, Charlie, that you could not stay with us?' she asked, bending over mine a face on which still lingered the parting smile which had been given and received a few minutes before.

'You did not want me, dear,' I said, half sadly, half jestingly.

'Indeed, indeed, we did,' she answered, as if her own loving feelings must be shared by Walter too. 'We always shall. Am I not your own and only sister, Charlie? and is not Walter going to be your own and only brother?'

Even in the dying light, I could see Scot raise his face; and, reading its agony, I involuntarily laid my hand on Pennie's lips. Then I laughed nervously at her astonishment.

'Scot is waiting to hear your secret from yourself,' I said, wishing with all my heart that I had told it to him while we sat alone there in the twilight.



'Oh, Scot,' she began, with shy hesitation, 'I didn't see you else I would have told you. At least I think so, if—if Walter hasn't.'

'You have kept Walter so entirely to yourself, little lady,' I put in hurriedly, 'that he cannot have told anyone.'

'He—and I,' said Pennie, in slow, happy tones, but with timid, shrinking eyes as she looked at him, 'are—engaged, Scot.'

'Yes,' said Scot, quietly.

She paused a minute, waiting for him to say more, then tossed back her bright little head, and looked down comically at me.

'Ought not Scot to say he is glad, or something of that kind, Charlie? Isn't— isn't it customary?'

I saw that she was speaking at random, and that her cheeks had flushed and her eyes filled with tears, as she read what was, to me, so sadly familiar in the grave, kind face.

'I think you need no congratulations, dear,' I put in, hurriedly; 'you have enough in your own heart.'

Her fingers closed tightly on mine, yet she had recourse to her old petulance immediately.

'Scot is hard and stern and cold to me, as usual,' she stammered. 'Just because I made a few mistakes in a paltry translation to-day.'

Scot was standing against the table close to us then; his slight figure leaning a little; his face white and proud.

'If I *can* be hard and stern and cold to you, then let me be so, child, in pity; for under it all my heart burns with a wild, strong love which I—cannot always—govern. Let me bury it if I can, whatever comes to—to take its place.'

There was a long, motionless pause among us; then with a startled movement, as if something were suddenly made clear to her, Pennie left my side and stood close to Scot. She laid her two little hands on his, and spoke with glistening eyes.

'Some day, Scot, when you have taught Charlie and me all that we shall be able to learn—it isn't much, you know you will go out into the great world and find a happiness like mine; only deeper, because your heart is deeper. And when you tell me of it—as you will do, because we shall be always friends—I shall say, what you are saying to me now with your kind eyes, "God bless you in your happiness!"'

Scot took the earnest hands and held them closely for a minute; but if he spoke at all I did not hear what he said. Then he went away, and Pennie sat down beside me, very still and silent; while the darkness crept in and hid her face.

## II.

'Isn't that a true line, Charlie. "Theirs is the sorrow who are left behind"?''

Pennie was driving me home from the station. We had been to see Walter off to London, on his way to the Continent, where he was to spend six months travelling with two of his old college friends. The hands were unnecessarily tight on the rein; the rounded cheeks were very pale in the fickle March sunshine; and the young voice was bright only by a great effort.

'Which I suppose is a very soothing reflection for you, because you love Walter so much better than yourself.'

'Yes; but I was thinking of some one else too. May we drive on to see Mrs. Cowen? She said this parting would break her heart.'

'Not to-day, Pennie; Scot is there. He is best to be with her now—best to be with her always, if she did but know it.'

'Not better than Walter, Charlie,' said Pennie, her eyes all aflame in their sorrow; 'not better than such a dear, dear, pleasant fellow. Scot is not the very idol of his mother's heart—like Walter.'

'No; the mother's heart being set against him.' I stopped with a laugh, for I would not vex Pennie to-day with this old argument of ours.

'Now, Charlie,' she said, her face so happy in its love, so wistful and tender in this first pain of parting; 'in spite of all you choose to say of Scot's goodness and of Walter's thoughtlessness, you know very well that everybody loves Walter best. They can't help it. Neither can I.'

She seemed to miss Walter very sadly, yet she was just her own wilful self all the time. Always waiting on me, teasing Scot, and acting the pleasant demure little mistress of the house when our father came home at night. Often I felt very angry with her; and at last one day, when Scot had had one of his hard struggling mornings, I followed her out and told her I could not, and would not, stand by and see his pain.

'You ought never to study with us,' I said, hotly. 'You should learn nothing all your life rather than learn from him.'

'But there is no one else to learn from.'

'Then I wish to heaven he would care less for my good, and go away for his own sake.'

'That would be very unkind; though I daresay that he will do it soon.'

'You, of all the world, ought to judge Scot most tenderly and kindly, Pennie,' I cried. 'Leave him to himself. I shall miss you woefully, as you know; but I would rather you never came near us until work is over, and we all meet on equal ground.'

'Charlie,' she said, in a voice of utter solitariness, 'I am always lonely and restless and mischievous away from you ; but—I will not come in again.'

And then of course I was uncomfortable, though I had gained what I wished.

After that, Pennie's behaviour to Scot changed. Day after day, in the most easy and natural manner imaginable, she seemed to forget to join our studies, offering no forced reasons, and showing no conscious embarrassment ; and day after day she grew quieter and quieter to Scot ; not kinder exactly, or more conceding, but more thoughtful. She went alone very often to see Mrs. Cowen ; but these visits never cheered her. The mother's blind idolatry of the son, contrasted with the son's easy carelessness of the mother, fretted Pennie's tender heart sorely. I saw how her thoughts ran upon it after her visits, and at those times I never spoke one word against Walter. Yet once or twice, when Pennie told me how he said he had not time to write home, and so she must go and tell his mother about him, my impatient words would escape ; and I said that a man who cou'd not take a few minutes' trouble to please a mother who loved him so devotedly, was not worthy to win any other love.

Walter had been away about three months, when one day Scot was sent for home in haste, Mrs. Cowen being ill. He was away all night, but at ten next morning, when Pennie and I strolled into the study, there he was waiting for me.

'Why, Scot,' I exclaimed, meeting him gladly, 'I didn't expect you back ; certainly not to work. Have you breakfasted ? How is Mrs. Cowen ?'

'A little better, thank you,' he said, turning slowly from me to take Pennie's offered hand. 'I breakfasted long ago.'

'Have you sent for Walter ?' asked Pennie, her eyes fixed upon his face.

'Yes.'

And then he sat down calmly in his place, and we read together ; while Pennie stood silent, leaning against the window-frame. I did not know whether she was glad that she should see Walter again so soon, or sorry for his pleasant excursion to be interrupted.

Each day now, as soon as our studies were over, Scot went home ; and in the afternoon Pennie drove me to Easter Hill, and, leaving me in the carriage at the gate, went up to the house alone on foot to see Walter's mother. She never stopped very long, though I am sure that if Mrs. Cowen had liked to have her, she would have taken up her abode there, to watch and nurse by night and day. But the sick mother cared for no one ; only counting the hours before her son could come, and fretting that Scot had not bade him hasten. The day when Walter might have arrived had passed, and only then could I see how un-

questioningly Pennie had depended on his coming. She seemed bewildered ; unable to believe he was not in the train ; and she stood on the platform as it rolled away, her yearning eyes following it piteously.

'There were so many hindrances possible,' I told her ; 'so many unforeseen things might have occurred to delay him.' But she never answered me a word ; and when that whole week went by and still he did not come, her silence grew more distressing to me than the most passionate grief or anger.

On the last day, the post brought two letters. One for Pennie, which she read with cold, tight lips, then threw across to me ; and one for Scot, which he had taken away with him unopened.

The *mater* was so fidgetty, Walter wrote, that it would be ridiculous for him to take alarm at her every fear ; doubly ridiculous to suppose that she really wished him to come home from such a distance, and have the expense of going back when her little attack of fear had subsided. She wanted him with her, he supposed, as she always did, being weak enough to be very fond of him ; and in a month or two he should be back with her. In the meantime he had written to her, and it would be all right.

I read no more. I folded the letter, and passed it back to Pennie, asking her if she did not think it would be better for Scot to have a holiday for a time, that he might not feel his duties pulling him two different ways.

'No, Charlie,' she said at once. 'Papa and I both think—as you would, if you had been to see Mrs. Cowen—that it is better for Scot to have his old work. If he were constantly with her—she fretting as she always is for Walter—it would harass and weary him more than this change does. She never expresses a wish to have him always there ; yet he is a tender, cheerful nurse, Charlie.'

I did not answer, for just then Scot came in, greeting us both with his gentle smile. He had been to the station—a fruitless errand now, and Pennie had never been since that first hopeful day—and I could see by her glance at his solitary figure as he came up to us, that the old hope had been with her this morning. I had thought it would be so, because by this time Walter might have arrived in answer to the letter she herself had sent, urging him to come.

'Don't you think my letter must have miscarried, Scot ?' she asked, with quiet wistfulness.

Oh, Walter would be sure to come, Scot said, looking quickly away from her face. There was no placing dependence on foreign posts.

'Suppose you were to write again,' proposed Pennie, diffidently.

That was exactly what he had been thinking. There must have been some mistake in the last address.

'Wouldn't it have come back in that case?' I suggested.

'Not yet, perhaps; not yet, would it?' asked Pennie, eagerly reading Scot's face.

'We certainly ought not to expect it back so soon,' he said, hurrying to reassure her. Still he would not wait for it; he would write again at once.

And after he left us, I could not help telling Pennie what I had heard at the post-office—that every night a letter went from Scot to his brother, with a large 'Immediate' on the envelope.

Pennie turned away from me in angry heat.

'What does he write, then? Why doesn't he write what will bring Walter home, and not what frets and worries him, yet keeps him there while his mother is—dying! Then her wrath and courage broke down, and she leaned her tired little head against me, and sobbed out all the fear, and love, and disappointment which she had hidden so long.

After that she was very petulant with Scot; more petulant even than in old times. And when the subject which I knew to be always uppermost in her thoughts was mentioned, she would say impatiently that we all made a ridiculous fuss: that Mrs. Cowen was not really very ill, only fancying it; that Walter, of course, would come as soon as he could; and that she was tired to death of the worry there was in the house just through the stupidity of Scot's letters.

Saying nothing of her own letter, which had been equally unavailing, I would try to tempt her to read with me, or play, or drive; but she would only refuse me with a quick 'No,' and leave me suddenly; coming back presently to throw her arms around me, and sob that she was a wretched, ungrateful girl, and did not deserve to be loved by me or—Walter. And as this wearying time wore on, she went about the house with small, tight lips and restless hands; and grew always harder and more contradictory to Scot whenever she spoke to him at all.

Four weeks had gone by since Pennie's last letter had been sent to Walter, when, early on one sunny August morning, Scot sent a messenger to tell us that his mother was dead. I had to break this news to Pennie myself, and when I had done so, in a few sad words, she broke from me, and ran upstairs. Through that long, lonely day she never came near me, and then I began to realize what it would be to live without either my sister or my friend.

I sent a telegram off to Walter at once, announcing his mother's death—though I felt sure Scot had done so. And at last my father came in, and Pennie crept back into her place among us.

Not once did she mention Walter's name to me; and on the night before the funeral, when—following the arrival of the London express—a cab drew up to the door, I heard her tell the servant that she was engaged 'to anyone.' He, knowing he had

not misunderstood her quiet, firmly-spoken order, told Walter so, and let him drive away in the darkness to the home which was so doubly darkened now.

It was the morning after Mrs. Cowen's funeral, and I was sitting in our pleasant study, basking, as invalids love to do, in the sunshine. Leaning at the window, in her old attitude, stood Pennie, looking out upon her cherished flowers, but evidently seeing little of their beauty. Scot was sitting at the table, his head upon his hand. Whether it was the long vain watching for Walter, or the sleepless nights and hard days' work, or the old hidden grief,—I did not know, but certainly his face was white and haggard as I had never seen it before. Suddenly he looked across at me with his own brave smile.

'Come, Charlie, we have been idle too long, dear fellow.'

I had risen, and was sauntering towards him, when the door was opened, and a familiar face looked in upon us, subdued and pale, but handsome as of old.

'Pennie darling! Fancy never coming to meet me!' Walter cried, coming forward in the glowing sunshine. 'Pennie darling——' And he was close beside her, his arms open to receive her.

She gave one look into his face (so swift that she only seemed to have moved her eyes from the garden into the room), then she spoke to Scot, who had risen.

'Where are you going, Scot? Please don't go away. This is your room, not ours. I am going myself in a minute, when I have spoken to you—and Walter.'

'Pennie, are you angry, dearest?' whispered Walter.

'No; not at all,' she answered, moving from him, and standing beside the table at which Scot had sat down again. 'I cannot now make myself feel even angry with you, Walter.'

'Thank you. Thank you, dear,' he said, joyfully. 'Come you with me. I want to tell you how it was.'

'Tell me here,' she answered, very quietly.

'That's hardly fair,' he complained (with reason I thought); 'but, of course, my darling, I never fancied my mother was really so ill.'

'I told you,' returned Pennie, still more quietly.

'Yes, you did so,' replied Walter, looking for the first time a little nervous and anxious; 'but I knew she was always fanciful, and I thought this was one of her false alarms. You ought to be sorry for me, Pennie. I thought you would feel for me in this grief.'

She did not look into his face, where was a shade of real grief; and he went on passionately, in her silence.

'Pennie, I want to speak to you. Come away. Why do you stay here?'

'Because,' she said, moving a little, and laying her hand on the back of Scot's chair; 'because I would rather speak here. Scot, will you listen to me; and—once more—teach me?'

She paused for a few moments. Walter, leaning against the table, looked down upon her in astonishment.

'Scot, if I have learned that I made a great, great mistake in thinking that I loved your brother more than—anyone else, isn't it best and kindest to tell him so now, before it is too late?'

Scot did not answer her: and she repeated the question, her beautiful eyes child-like in their pleading. 'Would it be right to tell him so, Scot, or to go on in the falsehood?'

'Right to tell him so,' answered Scot, with a new hopelessness now in his patient tones.

'Then, Walter,' she said, raising her face to his while it flushed and paled rapidly, 'I will tell you of my mistake now, in the presence of your brother and my own. There were once two gifts of love within my reach; and the one which my eager, ignorant hand grasped, because it seemed most bright and winning to my dazzling eyes, was *not* the one which could satisfy my heart. I did not understand either then; I was as powerless to feel the deep self-forgetfulness of the one, as the shallow selfishness of the other; but now that I know my own heart, Walter, I cannot hide its disappointment. Some day I myself shall be old and suffering perhaps—fanciful, too, I dare say; for those who give much love, to win but little in return, often are—and I should not like to pour out, all through my life, a wealth of love on one who could laugh at me for the exacting intensity of the gift. And so I am very, very grateful that I have read this in my heart—before it was too late.'

'This is nonsense, Pennie,' interrupted Walter, with a forced smile. 'Come and let me explain to you.'

You have done so,' Pennie said, still with her hand on Scot's chair, and still with her eyes clear and undrooping. 'You have explained it all to me during these last weeks. You have given me ample time to think, Walter. Now it is my turn, and I am trying to do so; only it seems as if I could not say much, even now, of what is in my heart. Your mother had a faithful, careful nurse, Walter, in all her illness; and by him no duty was neglected. Charlie, did Scot seek his own pleasure through that time; did he fail in any one of his duties through all the time that Walter was seeking his pleasure ceaselessly, and failing in his one duty?'

'Not one,' I answered, as Pennie looked eagerly across at me.

'Not one,' she repeated, the little hand tight on his chair, but her face never turned to Scot. 'Not one. Did any remembrance of the pain he daily suffered—the pain I gave him by my thoughtless treatment of him; and the pain his

stepmother gave him by her neglect of his quiet, dutiful love and her longing for her son—weaken his hand, or chill his heart? Did it, Charlie?’

‘Never,’ I said again, looking for a moment into Walter’s vexed and moody face.

‘Never,’ she repeated. ‘Did any one thought of himself make him shrink from his duty to you, Charlie, because I made it bitter to him? Or from his duty to his mother, because she blamed *him* that her own idolised son left her to die alone?’

‘Not one.’

‘Walter, the love of such a heart is a prize for which to be grateful through all years; and through all years I will be grateful that once this prize was mine. Scot, dear Scot, you who have taught me all the little that I know; ‘teach me what to do now that my heart is hungering wearily for such a love as that from which I turned away not long ago.’

Not a word did Scot answer, while his face was hidden in his hands.

‘I am waiting for your answer, Scot.’

The hand that had been on his chair loosed its hold; the standing figure slipped down, and kneeled upon the floor beside him; and both hands were laid upon the tremulous fingers in his hair.

‘Look, Scot, how I am waiting for your answer,’ she breathed. ‘I have never been obedient to you before, much as you have taught me; but I am waiting to obey you now.’

What a face it was that her gentle touch uncovered! How plainly its wondering, bewildered joy told of the anguish that had been lived through! Pennie’s low cry burst involuntarily from her lips when she saw it:

‘Oh, Scot, forgive me for it all!’

THE END.











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